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Lenny Von Dohlen  
interviewed!**

**David Lynch's  
The Straight Story!  
The X-Files!**

# Wrapped in Plastic

No. 62

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Donna Hayward (Lara Flynn Boyle)  
are caught in Harold Smith's  
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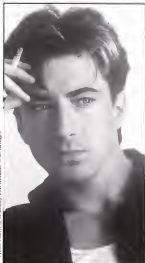


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# Outside Harold Smith

## The Lenny Von Dohlen Interview

Lenny Von Dohlen appeared in only four episodes of *Twin Peaks* (and one brief scene in *Fire Walk With Me*), but the character he played—the reclusive, agoraphobic, Harold Smith—is memorable for a many reasons. Harold Smith was the first major new character to enter the *Twin Peaks* narrative in the second season, and his appearance in the story added a extra dimension to the mystery surrounding Laura Palmer's life (and death). But more than that, Von Dohlen's splendid performance brought Harold Smith distinctly to life. Harold represented a mystery that—like so much in *Twin Peaks*—never got fully resolved. Although on-screen for only a handful of scenes, Von Dohlen imbued Harold with richness and complexity. Of course, credit for the character should also go to the show's superb writing staff, but Harold Smith was made uniquely real by the talents of Von Dohlen.

Best known for his work in film and television, Lenny Von Dohlen is also an accomplished stage actor who continues to pursue his theatrical career in the Los Angeles area. The rigorous demands of stage work impact the way Von Dohlen approaches his on-screen roles. Rather than rely solely on scripts to define characters, Von Dohlen does extensive research into the personalities he plays in order to bring authenticity and depth to each of his roles. As a result, his performances shine.

Lenny von Dohlen spoke to us by phone on December 6. John transcribed the interview, and Craly and John edited it. Although it has been over a decade since he briefly appeared in the *Twin Peaks* story, Lenny was both gracious and patient as we asked some detailed questions about

his character and his work on the series. We thank Lenny Von Dohlen for taking time to speak to us about his career, his thoughts on acting, and, of course, his experiences on *Twin Peaks*.

**Thorne:** You attended this year's *Twin Peaks Festival* in Seattle. What were your impressions?

**Von Dohlen:** I don't know what I expected, exactly. But it wasn't that at all. I found the people so respectful and sweet and benign. I had thought that I would be scared.

**JT:** Some of the other actors have said similar things. Catherine Coulson has commented on the intellect of the fans.

**LVD:** The fans were very bright and fun. I enjoyed it very much.

**JT:** Were you surprised to be contacted to appear so long after *Twin Peaks* had ended?

**LVD:** Actually I had been contacted for many years, but I always thought, "Oh, no, that's not me." To be honest, the fact that my daughter is in Seattle influenced me going. And I'm so glad I did. Not just to see her, but to experience the festival. I had a great time working in that world [of *Twin Peaks*]. I have never been given such creative license. I felt like such a collaborator. So I was happy to revisit it.

**Miller:** How did you get the role of Harold Smith?

**LVD:** I changed a line—which is probably sacrosanct. It's in the show. At the end of the scene where Donna comes to see Harold for the first time, he gives her an orchid for Laura's grave. At the end she says, "I'll be back," and he was supposed to say something like, "I'll look forward to it." But I said, "I'll be here." It amused me, I audition so horribly. I hate it with all my heart. So if you can find one or two ways to amuse yourself, then it is not quite so hideous.

**CM:** Did you audition for Mark Frost and David Lynch and Johanna Ray?

**LVD:** Yeah, Johanna—she has been a champion of mine for a long time. And Mark and the others were there, too.

**CM:** Did you know that the role would be limited to four or five episodes?

**LVD:** Yes, I knew he would meet his demise. I just didn't know exactly how. I suggested something at a very late hour. It came to me that he should not hang, but gas the orchids and himself, and have [the orchids] all lying over him. It was kind of exotic and bizarre. I ran it by David, and he said, "Lenny! Never come to me with a great idea twelve hours before shooting! The bean is already up there!" [Laughter] So Harold hanged himself.

**CM:** They did have a shot of you gassing the orchids after Donna and Maddy left.

**LVD:** That was a kind of compromise.

**CM:** It's a great shot. It works perfectly, because he had earlier said to Donna, "You've contaminated this place!" Later, Harold is shown gassing the orchids with a look of pain on his face.

**LVD:** Every character I dealt with, including my own, inhabited such intense worlds, so that when they collided it was extremely exhilarating and debilitating at the same time.

**JT:** *Twin Peaks* was already a phenomenon by the time the second season started. How much did you know about the show? Had you been watching the first season?

**LVD:** This is what is interesting to me. I was part of the ignorant masses. I had not seen any David Lynch movies. Since then, of course, I rectified that—big time! He didn't have an M.O. for me. They sent the tapes up to the house after I got the part so I could go into that world. That's what I like to do—feel the



Lenny Von Dohlen as Harold Smith in *Twin Peaks*

© Capital Cities/ABC

world I am in, completely, and then enter it as authentically as possible. I thought, "This reminds me of some acid trip I had a long time ago! I can't believe this is happening on TV! Yeah, count me in!" So I approached it with that kind of naked, genuine need to be real. I talked to a lot of homebound people all across this country. They were very sweet and helpful.

**CM:** That's interesting, because Harley Peyton has said that Harold Smith was based on an actual person named Arthur Crew Inman, a reclusive man from Boston who hired people to tell them their life stories, which he then wrote into his own diary. Did Peyton, or anyone else, ever reveal the origin of the character to you?

**LVD:** Peyton was always very willing to talk about the character, and we did. But I don't recall ever having heard that, no.

It's interesting, because I was talking to my manager on the phone just before talking with you. I told her about what I was going to do, and she said, "What an innovative show. But not 'innovative,' because it has never been repeated." It has been influential. It is a

shame, because it seems its day has come and gone. I don't watch TV too much, though I hear *Six Feet Under* is pretty good.

**JT:** We know it has been a number of years since you played the role, but there were some lines of dialogue that were cut from some of your scenes, and we wondered if you might be able to comment on them. In one scene, Harold was supposed to say he did not know why he could not go outside. In a later scene, when Harold does attempt to go out and then has a seizure, he says, "I just got too close." First, do you remember if you shot any of this material? Second, did you ever have any idea as to why Harold was a recluse and afraid to go out?

**LVD:** I don't remember those specific lines. But they are certainly subtextual. I tend to not want to give my subtext away. If it comes through, that's great. I'd rather do it with a gesture or a look. I thought, "What can I bring to this?" Anybody who lives in Los Angeles with any sense at all and who has to get on the freeway contemplates agoraphobia. I am not an agoraphobic, but I have those tendencies. I could easily go

there. I think someone hurt him, damaged him, in a way that left him almost legless. It is a horrible thing. I've dated younger people in my life. And I guess I thought I would never meet someone who was as old as I was and who was healthy and beautiful but who was not hurt beyond repair.

**CM:** You mention gestures. One of the things I noticed about the character was the precision with which he did things. It suggests a desire to keep his world very organized. Did you develop these characteristics, or were you directed that way?

**LVD:** I recall that all that happened in the first camera rehearsal. I talked about entering a world [and] that world is complete in me. Then things happen that are not about words. I found out that people who have one phobia generally have more than one. I thought that maybe he would be a clean freak and an order freak. That's, I think, where all that came from.

**CM:** So it was the most logical way to play the character? It wasn't that the director was telling you to do things?

**LVD:** No. In fact, that was what was so unique about that world, especially

working with David on the movie. It was almost by sheer osmosis that he was encouraging me to walk a high wire as an actor, to go out and to experiment and be unafraid. That is not something that is generally nurtured in TV.

**CM:** We've heard that David allows a certain kind of creative energy to take over on the set, and some things happen that may not have been planned.

**LVD:** Exactly! I'm reminded of the scene in the movie with Sheryl Lee, whom I adore. It goes back to that thing about each character having their own world. It is almost like lava. At that moment in their lives both Laura and

Harold had a lot going on, separately, but when it came together, it was supercharged. Nobody probably knows how many levels that scene plays on. By the end of it we were both shaking. Sheryl was really shivering. She had put herself through it. I was worn out, too. When it was over, I saw some movement out of the corner of my eye. David was dancing a jig! I thought, "Wow! That's what it should be about." He was celebrating the exploration. He acknowledged the moment. And that is very, very, very, very rare.

**JT:** Did he just let the two of you find your own way in that scene, or did he

stop you from time-to-time and try to steer you?

**LVD:** It was just the most thrilling way to work. I don't know how he did it, really. It was never like some directors, where they say, "Make that face like you did in that other movie." He is an intellectual, but he is also an alchemist.

**CM:** We've heard from other actors that Lynch creates an environment that allows an actor to deliver a really powerful performance.

**LVD:** He is truly remarkable that way. I wonder if, because his M.O. is so well known, actors go in knowing, as I didn't, what kind of experience they are in, and what kind of aesthetic he represents. By the time we did that scene, I was keenly aware of his work and the fact that he was a painter and a visual artist. I thought the image of Harold clawing at the door, unable to get out, would be a picture appropriate for that world.

**JT:** Let's briefly jump back to the series. Harold suffers from a physical reaction to the outside; it is almost as if something has attacked him. What do you remember about that scene or the direction you received from Graeme Clifford?

**LVD:** Yes. He directed Francis. As I recall there was, again, a lot of freedom. I discussed with him the research I had done. People who have had anxiety attacks when they leave their homes have what feels like a heart attack. So I thought, "Oh yeah, that left hand is going to do something—it is going to feel weird and go numb." And, [Harold would think,] "Oh s---, this is what I've read happens to people like me." So, he kind of gives himself a fit. He makes himself worse than he would be because he is so afraid of the consequences. He won't let himself be brave. He's a bit of a drama queen, isn't he? [Laughter]

Whatever the outside is, it puts him in such a state. I don't know what I filled my head with to get me there. Probably the freeway. Probably hateful people—some of whom are on the freeway!

**JT:** You had the honor of appearing in one of the cliffhanger scenes—the one in which you threaten Donna (Lara Flynn Boyle) and Maddy (Sheryl Lee). You end the scene by cutting your cheek with the sharp garden tool. Up until this scene Harold came across as an unusual, if eccentric, character, but here he seems to be insane. Did you think this was a change of direction for the character?

**LVD:** I did. I didn't particularly like

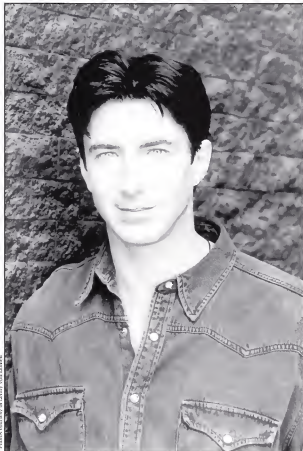


Photo courtesy of Larry Van Doren



that. There is a Web site devoted just to this character and how every other character I've played had some connection to Harold Smith. [Editor's note: The site is <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Boulevard/1884/pg43.html>] My sister showed it to me at Thanksgiving. I laughed so hard, I thought I was going to weep. But that image with the trowel going down my face brought back such memories. I hated doing that. I didn't think that right for him. It seemed out of character. But you try to make it work, if somebody wants it.

**JT:** That sequence with the trowel was not scripted. I thought that maybe the producers wanted a more stunning image to end the episode and so concocted that at the last minute.

**LVD:** I remember arguing strongly about that. He was not capable of doing harm to others. It was not something he could do; he was a nurturer, he was an arbiter of secrets. He had plenty of his own, but he wouldn't do it. It comes back to me now—we compromised. They said he had to do something and so it was, "He'll do it to himself." I could make that work.

**JT:** In the next episode, he backs

down from his threat to kill. He just tries to grab the diary back. He doesn't seem to want to hurt them, just scare them.

**LVD:** I think that is where it was going.

**JT:** Later in that same episode, Harold is shown howling in grief because of Donna's betrayal. The howling reminded me of the way Bob [Frank Silva] seemed to scream. Do you know if this was deliberate?

**LVD:** It was happenstance. But, you know, it's a world where you're apt to howl. [Laughter] I mean, every character in it, given the chance, might throw their heads back and howl! It's not a bad thing to do! In most shows you'd call that "Chewin' up the scenery," but [here] that was just, "Getting by in 'Lynchville!'"

**CM:** Did you work with David Lynch at all during the series?

**LVD:** Not as much as I probably would have liked. We talked on the phone. The longest [conversation] had to do

with my idea of having to gas myself. He also loved my idea of the little magnifying glass [Harold] wears around his neck. It was mostly stuff like that. Each show had a different director, and some were better than others.

**JT:** I assume, because we do not see your face, that you did not appear in the episode in which the police find Harold's hanging body. Is that true?

**LVD:** Yes. I may be giving away a secret. I might be screwing with people's heads, so use your own judgment. But, no, those were not my legs. I have better legs! [Laughter]

**CM:** Was your scene in *Fire Walk With Me* shot in Seattle or Los Angeles?

**LVD:** It was done in Encino. They had this studio. They had taken over this warehouse, and they had their own little world out there. It was wonderful—except for the freeway. For some reason they had torn the original set down so, for the film, they approximated it. I remember because there was a thing I had about the couch in the series. I kept picking things off it. Harold was one of those people. Then there was a different couch, and there was nothing to pick!

**CM:** Were you surprised when they contacted you to work in the film, given that your character had died in the series?

**LVD:** I remember I was doing another movie called *Leaving Normal* in Canada at the time. I was to go right into *Fire Walk With Me*. I think I knew that it was a prequel. I think there had been some talk about it and what characters would show up and who wouldn't. I didn't know I would be in it until they asked me.

"In *Fire Walk With Me*, Lynch] was encouraging me to walk a high wire as an actor."

**JT:** Your scene in the film is memorable and intense. How did you prepare for it?

**LVD:** I remember David screaming at his assistant, "Deepak [Nayar]! Never schedule the

most important scene in the movie for four a.m.!" Now that's either amazing, if that's true, or, more likely, it's a very clever director trying to get two tired actors to step up to the plate at four a.m. Of course, at the time, I thought he was serious, and I dug in!

**JT:** David Lynch seems to have a specific take on each of the characters in *Twin Peaks*. He even admits that he directed Kyle MacLachlan differently from how the other directors directed him. Did you feel he had a different approach to Harold?

**LVD:** That's a very interesting question. I didn't, because we had talked during the series a bit. I felt like he and I were on the same page. He seemed to encourage me to do what I was doing. Also, by that time I knew and trusted Sheryl. We became great friends, and we are very close to this day. That kind of jumping off of a very high board together was like going through *Outward Bound* together. You're tied together! Of course, you may never want to see that person again, but that was not the case with Sheryl—Miss Angel Face. I know she's a married lady, but I can still call her "Angel Face."

**CM:** Did you attend the cast screening or premiere of *Fire Walk With Me*?

**LVD:** Yes, I was there for that. I saw David get up and read the Gettysburg Address. It was at a huge theater at the

DGA building. Every suit in town was there. I thought, "Oh God! Another pretentious event! People don't know how to act here." I don't know who brought them up, but they weren't brought up the way I was brought up. You speak to people! You at least pretend you are a human being. I was sitting there. I was nervous. I hadn't seen the movie. I was thinking about how I got to meet David Bowie, and I thought that was worth it. Then they introduced David, and there was all the usual pompous stuff. He gets up in his inevitable blue blazer, pulls out a piece of paper, unfolds it, and proceeds to read the Gettysburg Address! And then he said not one word further and sat down! There were some agents looking at watches. I can tell you that.

**JT:** Were you surprised by the negative reaction the film received?

**LVD:** I think I wasn't so surprised. I

have a friend who watched it constantly. He watched it over and over. To be honest, I am thankful I am in it only as little as I am. It was such an assault on my psyche while watching it. I'm not saying that [such a thing] can't be a criteria for great art, but I don't know that I want my daughter to see it. At the same time I recognize that it is tremendously exciting to see someone with a vision, someone who has a such a strong view on the world.

Everybody is cookie-cutter now. [It is exciting] for David to be so brazen and bold and horrifying.

I did this episode of *CSI* recently. [You know, you have to jump through your ass to get a part, and then they hang you from a tree! *[Laughter]*] It was about torture. This guy I was playing was a torturer. I did my research. At the suggestion of a friend, I looked at [Pier Paolo] Pasolini's *Salò*. I don't know if that's a film you know, but look at it. I would be very surprised if David Lynch wasn't influenced by it. It helped me a great deal in getting into this *CSI* world. It was Pasolini's last film, and it was very controversial at the time because it was shocking—there were people eating excrement and other such things. Despite all the gross stuff and hideous things, it was gorgeously shot. Every image was like a painting. It was extremely hypnotic. He was a great artist. I think that just because [a film] turns your stomach, or makes you feel not too good about humanity, those things are still valid for artists to say and to show the world. Some people who can watch it over and over are obviously not as disturbed by it as I am.

**CM:** Well, *Fire Walk With Me* is a disturbing film, and I can't imagine how Sheryl Lee got through it. Her performance is wrenching, and she is in almost every scene.

**LVD:** She was so brave. I don't know many actors who could do that.

**CM:** I know you have been in many other projects, but do people still recognize you from your work on *Twin Peaks*?

**LVD:** In every job I've ever done since *Twin Peaks*, at least one person comes up to me on the set who was devotee of that series. So, yes, I'm often known for that role.

I did a movie called *Blind Vision* right before I did *Twin Peaks*. We had

"I want to act like Flannery O'Connor wrote—for blood."



Photo courtesy of Laura Van Delft





About this scene Von Dohlen says, "I didn't think that right for him. It seemed out of character."

a great director of photography named Frank Byers, who ended up working on *Twin Peaks*. So I had a great relationship with him. He was behind the camera, and he shot it as well as lit it. I needed him, and I trusted him. I would look to him after every take. We had a relationship going in to *Twin Peaks*. I knew his crew, and they were good guys. There was a family there. That character in *Blind Vision* was a loner, and he was a voyeur. It was almost like that guy was a stepping stone to Harold Smith. I had played very different kinds of roles before that. I don't think there will be anybody quite like Harold.

I've done that, and I want to do other things. I'm proud of Harold Smith, but I've done a lot of other things that I am also proud of. The one thing I was most desperate to avoid, when I got into movies, was becoming typecast. If I have a phobia, that's it. There you go, that's my phobia—to be typecast. To be typecast is a huge a danger, because people's imaginations are so small. I don't want to be in that box.

I supposedly said something to *Interview* magazine, and it has followed me around ever since. I said, "I want to act like Flannery O'Connor wrote—for blood." If I did say it—and it sounds like me—I think that it's probably true. That sounds really intense, but I also have done movies

like *Home Alone 3*. At the time, I had convinced myself [the roles] were something else. At the same time, in the back of my mind, I know that this is just a sweet comedy. The hardresser on *Home Alone* came to me as I was sitting

in the corner with my head in my hands saying, "I've played Hamlet, I've played Romeo—what am I doing?" She shook her finger at me, and she said, "What's wrong with making kids laugh?" And it shook me out of it. I said, "Oh. Right. What a bunch of hog s--- I'm putting on myself. Just do the job and go to the next one!" But it means too much to me.

I mentioned *Blind Vision*. It is not a very good movie, but I worked with some fine actors. I had a week with Louise Fletcher, and I had a week with Ned Beatty, and I had a week with Robert Vaughn. Louise Fletcher [became] a very good friend of mine after that movie. She had arrived on the set after her sister had just passed away. She was asked to do a lot of work very quickly, and she was so calm, so easy. There was no upset and no stress. I said to Louise, "How are you like this?" Because I'm going crazy." She said, "Lenny, I wasn't always like this." So it gave me hope.

**CNE:** Are there any particular roles—different from Harold—that you would like fans to see?

**LVD:** Billy Galvin. I think that was one of the favorite things that I have done. I played the title role, and Karl Malden played my father. It was based on a true

(interview continued on page 28)

#### Lenny Von Dohlen Filmography

*The Powder Heart* (2001) (TV)  
*Breathing Hard* (2000)  
*Frontline* (1999)  
*Codillac* (1997)  
*Home Alone 3* (1997)  
*One Good Turn* (1996)  
*Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story* (1996)  
*Bird of Prey* (1996)  
*Tollbooth* (1994)  
*Blind Vision* (1992)  
*Eyes of the Beholder* (1992)  
*Jennifer Eight* (1992)  
*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992)  
*Leaving Normal* (1992)  
*Love Kills* (1991) (TV)  
*Dracula's Widow* (1989)  
*Billy Galvin* (1986)  
*Under the Baltimore Clock* (1986) (TV)  
*Don't Touch* (1985) (TV)  
*Electric Dreams* (1984)  
*How to Be a Perfect Person in Just Three Days* (1983) (TV)  
*Sensations* (1983) (TV)  
*Tender Mercies* (1983)  
*Kent State* (1981) (TV)

#### Notable TV Guest Appearances

*C.S.I.: Miami* ("A Horrible Mind," November 25, 2002)  
*The Pretender*:  
 "The Inner Sense," May 13, 2000  
 "Til Death Do Us Part," January 15, 2000  
 "Wild Child," December 11, 1999  
 "Angel's Flight," October 30, 1999  
*The Magnificent Seven* ("Penance," May 3, 2000)  
*Chicago Hope* ("A Guy and His Dog," March 10, 1999)  
*Walker, Texas Ranger* ("Hall Of Fame," May 18, 1996)  
*Picker Fences* ("Bye-Bye, Brey-Hee," April 24, 1996)  
*Red Dwarf* ("Back To Reality," 1992)  
*Flash, The* ("Twin Strakes," April 12, 1991)  
*Twin Peaks* (episodes 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6: October and November 1990)  
*Young Riders*, The ("End of Innocence," January 30, 1989)  
*thirtysomething* ("We'll Meet Again," December 6, 1988)  
*The Equalizer* ("Shades of Darkness," November 5, 1986)  
*Tales from the Darkside* ("Distant Signals," November 17, 1985)  
*Mutant Vice* ("Give a Little, Take a Little," December 7, 1984)

—IMDb

# The Straight Story on "The Straight Story"

"Some love too little, some too long,  
Some self, and others buy,  
Some do the deed with many tears,  
And some without a sigh;  
For each man kills the thing he loves,  
Yet each man does not die."

—Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"

The late Victorian poet/martyr Oscar Wilde was only one artist among many indebted to the High Romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. While it may not seem particularly remarkable that Coleridge influenced generations of poets after him, it is striking that a number of films, including David Lynch's *The Straight Story*, are indebted to him. Sometimes this debt is deliberate and therefore acknowledged by direct allusion, other times, as in the case of *The Straight Story*, a decided similarity exists because Coleridge's work itself draws on earlier archetypal stories with which it has become part of a shared cultural heritage. In such cases, Coleridge's work does not function as a "source" that is consciously invoked, yet the pronounced analogies between the two prove to be most instructive. Critic Harold Bloom divides Coleridge's most memorable poems into the conversation group and the demonic group. The latter, which Bloom also labels "natural magic," as, he observes, "necessarily more famous," being composed of "the triad of *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan*," all three written between 1797 and 1801. Each reflects Coleridge's familiarity with the literature and folklore of the antiquated past, particularly that of the Middle Ages. Not surprisingly, it is this "demonic group" that has captured the imagination of filmmakers, as a few examples will show.

I hope to show how *The Straight Story* partakes of this film tradition, and to offer an alternative reading to those put forth thus far. Moreover, I would like to suggest that *The Straight Story* invites a reassessment of certain assumptions about Lynch's work. Like most strong artists, Lynch is both complex and idiosyncratic, yet if we assume that earlier works cast a certain light (or shadow) on later ones, we must acknowledge that

the opposite is also necessarily true: that *The Straight Story* challenges us to rethink our assumptions about Lynch's earlier work. This shadow cast by Lynch's previous films (itself, perhaps, a slight exaggeration) might have encouraged a certain misreading, even a distrust, of *The Straight Story*.

It is possible, however, that this film can act as a corrective to misconceptions about Lynch's art. In their essay "David Lynch Goes Straight," (WIP, 1:44 December 1999), Craig Miller and John Thorne identify several features of *The Straight Story* common to Lynch's other films as well, among them, significantly, the "optimism" of Dale Cooper and Alvin Straight, one that is shared by Lynch himself. Apparently, this is difficult for some critics and viewers to accept, even though, as their article points out, Lynch himself has declared it. "I'm such an optimist" (Lynch on Lynch) and those who work with him corroborate it. For instance, in the interview with Everett McGill

printed in the same issue, the actor states: "You know, while working on material that might have a darker read to it, David is just as delightful and full of fun. He's open, colorful, and humorous" (1:44, 10).

In *The Straight Story*, Alvin Straight—old and in poor health—lives with his daughter, Rose, in a small Iowa town. When he learns that his estranged brother, Lyle, has suffered a severe stroke, Alvin sets out to reconcile with him, enduring a 350-mile journey to Wisconsin, which he traverses on his riding lawnmower. The film has been viewed as a radical departure from his previous work. Again, I quote Craig Miller and John Thorne: "Cursewoy reviews have emphasized how different *The Straight Story* is from the director's other work. Certainly the G rating and Disney distribution raised eyebrows when the news was announced. But Lynch, while admitting that *The Straight Story* was 'an unusual film' for him, also told *The New York Times* that tenderness can be

just as abstract as insanity" (WIP 1:44, 2). In order to forge a continuity with his previous films, *The Straight Story* has had imposed upon it a certain dark undercurrent, or hidden text, that is not, finally, convincing. Alvin Straight is a complex but compelling figure, despite his flaws, and efforts to blacken his character in order to make the film conform to a preconceived notion of what a David Lynch film should or should not be have resulted in skewed readings, such as that of Tim Kreider and Rob Content in *Film Quarterly* (54:1, Fall 2000) and reiterated in the WIP interview with Kreider (1:52, April 2000).

The response to Kreider's essay and interview by one reader, printed in the "Letters" section of the following issue (1:53, 18), although brief, capably refutes the theory that Alvin himself is responsible for Rose losing custody of her children and that he is solely to blame for his estrangement with Lyle. I will offer additional arguments for discounting this view of Alvin. Indeed, if he is on a spiritual quest or journey—as almost all viewers and critics acknowledge—then it follows that, rightly understood, Alvin belongs in the tradition of the mythic quester heroes upon whom he is modeled (not the least of which is the incarnation of this figure in Coleridge's *Mariner*), and not with



Gustave Doré's rendition of the Ancient Mariner (1878)



Alvin Straight, quester hero

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the abusive acrobatics with whom he has been associated. Just as *The Straight Story* with Coleridge's poem (and its direct antecedents) provides a way to place Alvin in the quester hero tradition that is so prevalent in western art from the Middle Ages to the present.

Is such an approach justifiable? Lynch's indebtedness to avant-garde artistic practices allows us to answer in the affirmative because it is precisely the function of unusual juxtapositions to create new insights, or generate information. Daniel S. Mito suggests that all artistic experimentation involves one or more of the following procedures: "adding to X an element Y which is foreign to it; removing from X an element X1 that usually helps constitute it; and changing the scale; to observe and analyze X on a scale against which it isn't usually measured."<sup>2</sup> Throughout this essay, I will change the scale, or measure *The Straight Story* against texts which aren't (or haven't) been previously used, in the hope of shedding new light on it.

#### Coleridge and the Cinema

Coleridge himself provided the description of "Kubla Khan" as "a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment." This exotic verse about a medieval oriental ruler and his palatial dwelling is perhaps more familiar to film audiences who have seen Orson Welles' epoch-making *Citizen Kane* (1941), which quotes from the poem: "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan / A stately pleasure-dome decree." This quotation helps to align *Citizen Kane*, a ruthless Hearstian newspaper mogul who builds his own reclusive mission (Xanadu), the tyrannical Kubla Khan. The allusion to Coleridge's poem is both overt and significant, providing an intertext that augments *Citizen Kane*'s enigmatic nature and also his sinister obsession with power. (Is the name "Kane"

intended to invoke Cain? If so, the film also connects with Coleridge's *Mariner*, discussed below.) *Citizen Kane* serves as an example, then, of a film that acknowledges the work of Coleridge directly by its allusion to his "Kubla Khan," and perhaps also less directly by portraying its main character as an a transgressor, doomed to dwell outside the human circle.

Another film with a less direct Coleridgean antecedent is Lewis Allen's 1944 classic thriller, *The Uninvited*, starring Ray Milland, Ruth Hussey, and Gail Russell, about a young woman protected from an evil temptress by the ghost of her dead mother. It was adapted from Irish writer Dorothy Macardie's best-selling novel *Unwept, Threshold* (1942), itself modeled loosely on Coleridge's "Christabel," a two-part extended fragment about the seduction of an innocent young girl whose mother died giving her birth and whose father's excessive bereavement results in his neglect of his daughter. The poem employs the luma myth that Poe also later popularized in his short fiction ("Berenice," "Morella," "Ligeia"). Christabel encounters the luma in the form of a lesbian vampire, Geraldine; the poem vainly invokes both the spirit of the deceased mother and that of the ultimate mother—the Virgin Mary—to protect her. *The Uninvited* also portrays a vulnerable young woman who is threatened by a malicious female, the efforts of whom are thwarted by the protective spirit of the dead mother.

The final poem in his "daemonic group," Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," provides an uncanny but surprisingly apt comparison with Lynch's *The Straight Story*. Harold Bloom remarks that in it Coleridge "tells a story that relates itself clearly to a major Romantic archetype, the Wanderer, the man with the mark of Cain... who must expiate in a perpetual cycle the guilt of suffering, and whose torment is in excess of its usually obscure object and source" (218). Ultimately, as Bloom and others have noted, the poem "is in the tradi-

tion of the stories of Cain and the Wandering Jew," themselves antique archetypal myths of exiled transgressors, doomed to wander in what would seem to be an endless purgatorial cycle. (This pattern, incidentally, is present in the stories of Henry in *Eraserhead*, Sailor in *Wild at Heart*, and Fred Madison in *Lost Highway*, although the conclusions are worked out variously.) Coleridge certainly knew the story of the Wandering Jew from Bishop Percy's *Reliques* (1765), although other versions also exist.<sup>3</sup> The saga of Wandering Jew, who—though presumably saved by his conversion to Christianity—must wander in a purgatorial earth until the Second Coming, was popular during the Middle Ages, but with the rise of medieval romance in the 12th century, it was eclipsed by the more glamorous quest motif, especially that of Arthurian lore. In fact, the true archetypal quester hero is the knight Perceval, the naïve fool associated with Arthur's Court who initially fails but eventually redeems himself by healing the Fisher King, keeper of the grail. Coleridge's *Mariner* can also hope to be redeemed after his trials have made recompense for his fault. Following the tradition of Perceval's quest is his suggestion that the *Mariner* is perhaps able to atone for his

<sup>2</sup>Percy's collection features the story of the shoemaker who strikes Jesus in the back as he is led to his crucifixion, admonishing him to hurry. Jesus frowns and declares that, while he will do so, the insulting shoemaker must forever "tarry," resulting in a cursed existence for the Jew, even though he is soon after converted to Christianity, taking the name of Joseph. His curse is to age until he is about one hundred, at which time he is afflicted by a trauma or delusion and falls ill. At this time, he returns to his original age (about thirty) remembering and recounting all the details of Christ's crucifixion, as he was a witness to it. The cycle then begins anew, and it is the Wandering Jew's purgatorial torment to do so until Christ's Second Coming.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel S. Mito, "Towards an Experimental History, or Gay Science," *Strategies* 4/5 (1991), pp. 90-91.



Rose (Sissy Spacek) and Alvin (Richard Farnsworth)

transgression, which allows for the possibility, at least, of redemption. In *The Straight Story* Alvin Straight's is, indeed, a redemptive journey, one he undertakes as a self-imposed expiation for past mistakes, his own and those of others.

#### The Quester Hero Pattern and Coleridge's Mariner

Divided into six parts, Coleridge's ballad employs a frame device. The Ancient Mariner details one of a company of guests en route to a wedding and bids him, against his will, with his "glittering eye" (like Geraldine in "Christabel," the Mariner possesses a hypnotic gaze, as does Alvin Straight.) The guest/unwilling listener is impelled to hear the Mariner's fantastic story from beginning to end: how he and his crew crossed the equator, were driven by a storm towards the unknown regions of the South Pole and were befriended by a great white albatross, which they deemed a good omen. One day, the Mariner inexplicably killed the beloved albatross, bringing bad luck to himself and his mates. As punishment, his men bound the albatross' corpse to his neck. (Killing what one loves, as the Mariner slew his albatross, is echoed in the epigraph to this essay from Wilde's ballad.) Eventually, all aboard the ship perished except the Mariner himself, who nonetheless suffered deprivation, fear, and guilt. Obviously delusional, he then witnessed a game of dice between two phantom creatures, "Death" and "Life-in-Death," the latter of which won the Mariner's soul. Finally sorry for his transgression, he prayed for forgiveness, breaking the charm that bound the albatross to

his neck. It miraculously fell away and he was then free of the curse. Through supernatural intervention, the Mariner arrived home and was rescued, just as his ship was destroyed by a raging storm, the latter of which almost always represents renewal in Coleridge's work. He was shirren by a hermit which, he insists, "left me free." However, not entirely, for the Mariner also admits to his listener: "I pass, like night from land to land; / I have strange power of speech; / That moment that has face I see, / I know the man that must hear me; / To him my tale I teach."

In their discussion of *The Straight Story* and Lynch's previous films, Craig Miller and John Thorne identify the prevalence of divine intervention, citing as examples the "Good Witch" at the end of *Wild at Heart*, and an even closer analogy to the Mariner—when Ronette's bonds are broken by an agent of grace, allowing her to escape from the traincar in *Fire Walk With Me*. Grace also figures prominently in other Lynch films, including *The Straight Story* discussed below, a fact that is too often slighted in discussions of his work.

When the Mariner ends his story and imparts to the guest the lesson that cost him dearly ("He prayeth well, who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast"), his listener, who had earlier been so eager to attend the wedding celebration "Turned from the bridegroom's door." Moreover, "He went like one that hath been stunned / And is of sense forlorn. / A sadder and a wiser man, / He rose the morrow morn." This conclusion urges upon the reader that the Mariner's journey is designed to absolve him from his

past sin. It insists also, however, that the listener learns vicariously from the Mariner's mistakes.

Coleridge's Mariner, like the medieval knight Perceval, enjoys the possibility of hope, making his journey not only one of retribution but also of redemption. *The Straight Story* employs and continues, thematically, the Mariner's journey, by dramatizing Alvin's self-imposed expiation and the redemption he finds for himself and others. For while he must face the ghosts of his past, Alvin also helps others along the way, and very possibly lay to rest. Thus, as we shall see, Alvin is both the repentant sinner and sacrificial savior figure.

First, it must be remembered that this mythic pattern of the redemptive journey takes many forms, emerging out of medieval romance and folklore and repopularized in the early nineteenth century by Coleridge and other Romantic poets. In 1928, Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp published his pioneering study, *Morphology of the Folktale* (published in English in 1958) in which he identified the structural similarities of a large number of seemingly diverse stories, reducing every component in them to just thirty-two functions.

Propp's discovery of common narrative patterns is important because it points to their universality, showing that they transcend the apparent boundaries of history and culture. This is why an archetypal story enjoys several incarnations, each varied version can be and frequently are closely related without one necessarily serving as a direct "source" of another. Quest narratives also almost always feature a tripartite structure of separation, initiation, and return, or reintegration. The hero departs or is alienated from his home and family (sent on a quest), undergoes either an initiation into a higher form of consciousness or into adulthood through a series of trials or tests (often failing the first time), and then returns, at

"Alvin Straight belongs in the tradition of the mythic quester heroes....The archetype is the knight Perceval."

which point he may or may not achieve reintegration. Structural similarities such as this tripartite pattern, found in a number of stories from different cultures and periods, yoke them together categorically as redemptive journeys or spiritual quests.

The Mariner's is just such a story. He has experienced separation, initiation via a series of trials, and returns to his homeland at long last, even though his reintegration is not yet complete—he is relegated to the fringes of society only, a feature common in the western film genre as well. Recall George Stevens' *Shane* (1953) or John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), for instance, in which *Shane* (Alan Ladd), once he has become a gunfighter, cannot reintegrate into the culture by settling in a community, even though both he and the community desire it. Likewise, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) lingers in the doorway of his relatives' home, daring not to enter, even though he has restored his niece Debbie to her family. This is one way in which westerns are indebted to the genre of medieval romance: the characters remain solitary figures, even though the community depends upon them.

A typical quester hero, Alvin Straight (Richard Farnsworth), refuses three times to enter the house of Danny Riddion (James Cagney), refraining, presumably, until he completes his journey. Tim Kreeher and Rob Content read a deeper pathology into this than the film supports. It is an encoded message of his status as a character on the edge, but not necessarily because he killed or wounded (or wanted to kill, as did Ethan) a beloved relative, as the example of *Shane* (who has no such urge, despite his history as a gunfighter) clearly shows. (It is interesting that *Shane*, Ethan, and Alvin are all veterans.) Rather, the mythic pattern of separation, initiation, and return—in Alvin's case, a psychic return to an earlier, happier state—is also the one that informs *The Straight Story*, even though it ends on a more optimistic note than Coleridge's Mariner poem.

#### The Mariner, Alvin Straight, and the Quest

Alvin Straight's trek across Iowa to Mt. Zion, Wisconsin on his lawnmower is a spiritual journey that represents what is typically the longest stage in such narratives—the initiation—which involves a number of trials or tests that must be completed before the hero can return to his home and enjoy reintegration or reunion, the reward for his efforts. Viewing the film as a mythic or archetypal quest helps to account for several of its singular incidents and images, and this structure is what also elevates the film to the sublime height it attains.

At this point I must stress that my goal is not to consider *The Straight Story* as mimetic—that is, a literal portrayal of the

"real" Alvin Straight's journey, but rather, as art, a figurative representation of a universal truth, not tied to a quotidian reality or particular instance. As Lynch himself has said and Miller and Thorne quote, "It doesn't matter if the story is true or not. It's a story. Everything is a story." (WIP 144, 8). They also note that "the film makes no claim to be a documentary, docudrama, or meticulously faithful retelling. There is no based on a true story title card;" but only the end credit, "Alvin Straight, 1920-1996" (WIP 8). Whatever the "real" Alvin Straight's character and family circumstances were, whatever his "true" motivation for undertaking this incredible journey is, ultimately, of little use in understanding the mythic hero of this film. Art is not life, but a representation of life, framed experience, not a continuum. It is for this reason that the *The Straight Story* is enriched greatly when viewed as an archetypal redemptive quest; it is its figurative, or universal, truth that elevates it to its sublime status, as a comparison of it with the archetypal quest shows.

We first learn that Alvin's health is poor and failing fast. He collapses in his kitchen, and an ensuing visit to a physician (Dan Flannery) makes clear that Alvin's general neglect of himself, and his stubborn refusal to follow medical advice, has jeopardized his health even more. The doctor's diagnosis

start to take better care of himself. Alvin agrees to a second cure (another pun on "Cain"?), yet rejects everything else out of hand: "No operation. No walker. No tests. And I'm not paying for no X-rays." Alvin knows that time is "running out," but he seems not to care. Stoicism, however, is not resignation.

We also learn that he is liked by family and friends. He is extremely close to his daughter, Rose; the two are very protective of each other. Knowing her father is frail, Rose's panic is obvious when we first see her reaction to Alvin's collapse. "What have you done to my dad?" she asks Dorothy (Jane Galloway) and Bud (Joseph Carpenter). Likewise, Alvin tries to protect her from his own mortality by reassuring her that the doctor had given him a prognosis of long life. Each makes endearing comments about the other to several characters in the film, and the domestic harmony reveals their genuine affection for each other, such as their shared love of a lightning storm or stars on a summer night. Alvin's friends express concern when he fails to appear at the local bar, a gathering place for conversation, and for his enigmatic plans to depart Laurens, prompted by the telephone call about his estranged brother Lyle's stroke; in addition, Tom, the John Deere dealer (Everett McGill), compliments Alvin by jokingly telling him he always

thought him a man of good sense—until he heard the rumor that Alvin had decided to ride a lawnmower to Wisconsin. Tom and Danny Riddion function as doubles, both being calm, kind admirers of Alvin, as both are also associated with John Deere, a significant connection that I will discuss later in this essay. Seemingly an ordinary hero—stubborn, strong-willed, and subject to common human weaknesses—Alvin is nonetheless a sympathetic figure, perhaps even because of these rather obvious shortcomings. An increased awareness of his own failing health and the news of Lyle's illness prompt Alvin's separation from his home, making his difficult, self-imposed journey to reconcile with Lyle before it is too late. Paradoxically, the stubbornness that contributed to the quarrel between the brothers is the same the quality he needs to achieve his end.

Along with Rose and Alvin's friends, the viewer puzzles over Alvin's method of transportation. It is difficult enough to swallow one's pride and reconcile with someone with whom one is at enmity, even if it is a brother. But Alvin imposes another, almost impossible dictate—that, in his decrepit condition, he complete the journey alone. Regardless of the motive of his real-life counterpart, that of the mythic Alvin the film remains obscure: His poor eyesight may be a reason not to drive (though he manages to drive the mower), but he also rejects offers of being driven by anyone else.



Sir Percival and the Sick King Ewekake  
by William Russell Flint

includes Alvin's bad hips, poor circulation, possible diabetes, and the early stages of emphysema, followed by a warning that there will be "serious consequences" if he doesn't

Finally, if Alvin is really convinced that he or Lyle may not live much longer, there would seem to be more expedient ways to reach his goal. Alvin's decision is not, then, dictated solely (or even primarily) by extending physical circumstances, such as bad health, poor finances, or even a lack of volunteer drivers.

Alvin's desire to travel such a distance on a lawnmower violates our sense of verisimilitude, and when verisimilitude is frustrated (why would someone impose this formidable task on himself?) the mode of the film necessarily becomes semiotic or figurative. A lawnmower's function is to cut (i.e. resp), and the attached trailer functions as a kind of home on wheels that hearkens back to covered wagons and the days of trail blazers or pathfinders such as Natty Bumppo, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer*, which I will discuss in more detail later, but it also underscores that we are in familiar Lynchian territory, that of the road movie. At any rate, Alvin intends this journey to be one of expiation—he must earn forgiveness from others and himself, but perhaps he must also seek forgiveness for others, too—namely Lyle, who seems to be subject to the same killers as Alvin. The means, for Alvin, are as important as the end. As he tells Danny Riddion, when the latter offers to drive him from Clermont to Mt. Zion, "You're a kind man talking to a stubborn man, but I still want to finish this the way I started it."

#### Kindness to Strangers: Trial and Redemption

Most of *The Straight Story* focuses on the initiation stage, or test of the hero. On his journey, Alvin proves to himself, and by extension to Lyle, that he is worthy of redemption. Two important features of his journey that connect it with the archetypal spiritual quest (in general, and with the Mariner in particular, are the positive effect Alvin has on those he encounters along the way, and the confession of guilt, revealed only gradually, that is a necessary prelude to spiritual regeneration. This is a fact that Alvin recognizes at the outset, even as Perceval must heal both himself and the wounded Grail king or the Mariner must help others to help himself. Must not Alvin also assist others—including his brother—in order to help himself? The one task is inextricably tied to the other.

Other common features include fire and water, often as cleansing or purifying agents, examples of which abound, and the repeated motif of the stars, a crucial navigational device for mariners, but also for anyone on a pilgrimage to an unfamiliar place. In both *"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"*

and *The Straight Story* the stars signal the certainty of a moral force at work in the universe, while simultaneously underscoring the mystery. Craig Miller and John Thorne rightly note their metonymic function in *The Straight Story* when they assert that the "stars come to represent peace and eternal



The Mariner's "glittering eye."

stability" (1:44:7) although Tim Kreider and Rob Content maintain a different view:

the stars are not an unambiguous image of serenity, of making peace with the past and coming to rest, as Alvin hopes to do. There's no divine grace or forgiveness in evidence for him. Alvin's endlessly expanding starscape could just as easily signify vast emptiness and indifference, or the absurdity of human striving in the face of unsurpassable sublimity, or the profound gulf between human yearnings and any answering assurance. The point here is not to supply an answer to the open-ended question posed by this image, but to explicitly acknowledge that it remains open-ended.<sup>8</sup>

This statement is scarcely credible, mystery does not refute the presence of a benevolent, divine agency, nor does it imply

<sup>8</sup>Film Quarterly, 54: 1, 32.

an indifferent or hostile universe. Lynch told Chris Rockley: "Like someone said, 'Mystery is good, confusion is bad, and there's a big difference between the two'" ("Introduction to *Lost Highway*, xii). It is at right that the Mariner's saving epiphany occurs ("Sure my kind saint took pity on me"), and he is able to express through prayer his love of all living things. This saving grace is followed by cleansing rain that refreshes the parched quaker and assures his survival, after bouts of drought, sun, and fire. A friendly Spirit, governed by divine law, then guides the ship to the northern hemisphere, and the gruesome corpses of his dead shipmates are temporarily inhabited by spirits that allow for the ship to navigate to the Mariner's home before it is destroyed.

Grace is likewise the mystery that sustains Alvin through several setbacks: the failure of his "Rebels" mower during his first attempt at departure; the breakdown near the house intentionally set on fire, and the unexpected trouble he encounters as he approaches Lyle's house when his engine goes out, emitting black smoke and death groans. As Alvin sits helplessly close to his goal on an isolated dirt road, a benevolent, elderly stranger (Ralph Feldhacker) suddenly appears on a tractor, orders Alvin to "try her again," after which—presto!—the mower rather miraculously begins to part. Departing as suddenly and casually as he had appeared, this mysterious angel points out the right direction to Lyle's house. Curiously, this latter scene is filmed with a long shot, never allowing us to see a close-up of the stranger's face. Why not? Because the scene isn't supposed to be realistic, but figurative. As Craig Miller and John Thorne

observe, there is little exchange of conversation between the two, yet the stranger is instrumental in helping Alvin achieve his longed-for end. This event is scarcely plausible mimetically, it can only be accounted for by grasping (the stranger's figurative

**"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' provides a surprisingly apt comparison with *The Straight Story*."**

function as an instrument of divine grace, sent to help Alvin overcome his final obstacle.

In *The Straight Story* the stars are used as a prelude in the opening shot, followed in rapid succession by another central repeated image, that of the harvest (intended to remind us that we do, indeed, reap what we sow, however, Alvin isn't in the grave yet, and thus still has time to "sow" as

well as "reap". Soon after, Alvin says to his daughter, "Look up at the sky, Rose. The sky is sure full of stars, tonight," as they linger on the lawn and he explains that he must undertake his journey: the stars are emphasised during his encounter with a young runaway girl (Anastasia Webb); just before and then after his revelatory conversation with Verlyn (Wiley Harker); when he recounts his boyhood relationship with Lyle to the priest (John Lordan), remembering how they used to star-gaze and dream, and anticipating their reunion so they can "look up at the stars, like we used to do, so long ago". Finally, the stars serve as an affirmative coda in the last shot of the film. Without exception, the heavens represent hope, wonder, and transcendence—as Alvin himself states explicitly when he recalls his and Lyle's boyhood love of star-gazing, shared by Rose and the runaway girl.

The Mariner is possessed of a pre-terrestrial knowledge that allows him to identify a person in need of hearing his story—that is, a kindred spirit, capable of making the same error. (Oddly, the motive for the Mariner's crime is never revealed. Why should he shoot the albino, considered by all a good omen?) The Mariner is also a mesmerist, able to hold his unwilling listener with his "glittering eye" and his "skinny hand." He imparts his hard-earned knowledge to his listeners, who become "sadder and wiser" as a result.

It is essential to consider this function of the Mariner's quest as it compares with Alvin's journey. Alvin experiences the healing power of expiation (like the Mariner) but also administers advice to strangers, helping them to see the error of their ways and avoid the regret that Alvin himself must exercise from his own life. During his travels, Alvin imparts wisdom but also gains price of mind by confessing his regrets to various characters. This reciprocity is a peculiar feature of Coleridge's poem: the Mariner gains relief and works towards attaining forgiveness by relating his story to those who stand to profit from it: thus, both storyteller and listener benefit.

Alvin encounters a young runaway girl as he camps in a field, eating his simple supper of "weiners." The girl approaches Alvin's campfire; at first mildly contemptuous of Alvin, she is soon won over by his kind yet stern paternal air. She asks Alvin about his own life, and he tells of his deceased wife, Frances, and their 14 children, seven of whom lived, however, he talks the most freely about Rose, which is how we learn of her tragedy. What is perhaps most stunning is that Rose's stutter is not the result of the trauma of having her children taken from her by the state, but rather a contributory cause. Alvin insists rightly that her mind is "like a bear trap for facts," but her physical demeanor made her lose her four children when the second boy was badly injured in a fire that occurred when they were attended by a babysitter. Kreider and Content argue, however, that Alvin de-

cries himself and others about Rose's tragedy. Their evaluation of Alvin's character is that he is an abusive drunk who impregnated his wife fourteen times, injured one of his grandchildren through his negligence and caused four of them to be taken into the custody of the state, alienated his brother, and ended up living in near-isolation with his damaged, now childless daughter in a small, lonely, too quiet house" (PQ 541, 311).

This view of his character does violence to the film's aesthetic and ethical center. Specifically, the authors assert that Alvin set Rose's house on fire inadvertently, presumably because he was drunk and smoking a cigar. They base this very important assumption on three rather untenable premises: that he is repeatedly shown lighting a cigar, that he was an alcoholic at the time the mishap occurred (that he ever was one at all depends upon one's definition of the term,



which varies from a person who takes one drink every day to the stereotypical wine in the alley), and that he loses control of his mower on a downhill slope near the burning house in Clermont. This information, along with the fact that he fathered a large family, quarreled with his brother, and displayed a fondness for meat (weiners, deer, bräunschweiger), leads to their indictment of Alvin. The WTP readers who wrote a rejoinder to this view of his character pointed out that fire occurs in all of Lynch's works, with multiple meanings attached to it, that the use of ellipsis (characters not saying a lot) is common to Lynch, and that the alcohol issue is very undefined, and probably a problem of Lyle's as well. In fact, Alvin

transcends this rural-midwestern stereotype that Kreider and Content try to impose upon him (abusive father, self-gratifying husband, predatory carnivore), else the film could not possibly reach the multiple audiences it has. Their premises are faulty, supported by scant evidence, much of it extratextual (relying, for instance, on *laymen's* knowledge—e.g., the fatalistic truisms of Alcoholics Anonymous) and based on the preconceived notion that, since it is a Lynch film, *The Straight Story* can't really be straight, which they suppose to be too "simple," lacking in complexity.

The girl is put at ease by Alvin's sad story about Rose. Moreover, Alvin does not pry, but astutely guesses her motive for running away, asking her, "How far along are you?" She replies that she is five months pregnant and confides that neither her family nor her boyfriend know of her predicament—she has run away merely assuming that they would be angered disappointed, and reject her.

To change her mind, Alvin refrains from lecturing. Instead, he chooses to instruct, like Christ, by parable, using one that he had taught to his own children. (No, he is not Christ, but he uses the same parabolic method of instruction.) To illustrate the strength and importance of family unity, Alvin uses an analogy that a lone individual is to the family as a single weak stick is to an unbreakable bundle. This impresses the girl, who refuses Alvin's kind offer to sleep in his old trailer while he sleeps outside. "Lookin' up at the stars helps me think," she insists, and so it does, for the next morning when Alvin awakes the girl has apparently returned to her family to tell the truth about her "little problem," leaving a bundle of sticks by the fire as a sign that she has both learned from her encounter with him and determine her future course of action. Although Kreider and Content view this scene as an evaluative commentary that slyly invokes a likeness between Alvin and both the harbaric patriarchs of ancient Rome and the dictatorial Hideros in Kurosawa's *Ran*, their argument is unconvincing, considering the fact that Alvin's parable restores the girl's faith in her family, whom she had not given the chance to understand her plight. In this context, the sticks are neither the arrows of imperial Rome nor the rods of feudal Japan, and it taxes our credibility to make such an unwarranted leap just to indict an old man who helps a young girl in need.

Alvin next camps with the Rag-Bed Bikers, one of whom asks him the best and worst about getting old. He can think of little that is good about being "blind and lame," but at last he ponders, "I know to separate the wheat from the chaff and let the small stuff fall away" (another parable). Conversely, "The worst part of getting old is remembering when you were young." As his story gradually unfolds, we understand that this is an expression for past mistakes, two in particular, and not a wistful desire for youth,

For we learn, eventually, that Alvin shot his albatross, too (Kotz), an act for which no reparation is possible. He can, however, make things right between himself and Lyle, and the wisdom he shows is recognizing that some remorse can be assuaged. After this, Alvin witnesses the accident in which the hysterical woman kills a deer, a *Lynchian* grotesque moment containing the repetitive motif of the deer-slayer that I will discuss later as one of the magi-  
 aethic threads running through the film.

Perhaps the kindest people he meets are Darla and Danny Raordon (Sally Wingert and James Cadell), who offer Alvin shelter, encouragement, and compassion when his lawnmower breaks down in Clermont, Iowa. As he awaits the completion of extensive repairs to his mower, the key to Alvin's past is revealed in his conversation with another old timer, Verlyn. The two return to a tavern, where Verlyn guzzles down a Miller's Lite as Alvin sips a glass of milk. Alvin explains why he doesn't drink: "I picked up a mournful habit for liquor in France," and admits that when he came home from the war, "I was mean." A preacher, he continues, helped him understand that the reason for his drinking and meanness was "sein" all those things here that I seen over there," what might now be recognized as symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. The two swap stories about their experiences in World War II. He recognizes Verlyn's pain, a burden he has internalized for years: "I can see it in a man right away," Alvin confides, as he looks askance at Verlyn, who then unburdens himself by recounting the source of his own "survivor guilt." His entire unit had been destroyed by an incendiary bomb, while he had been spared because, as quartermaster, he had been situated on a rise making coffee when the surprise attack occurred. He blames himself for not having seen the German plane, since he was on a hill. Recounting this tragedy is a cathartic moment for Verlyn.

Alvin then tells his own war story, drawing an analogy between himself and Verlyn. We learn of the wrong he cannot right. He was guilty of what is called "friendly fire," having accidentally shot a soldier, Kotz, in his own unit. Alvin, a good marksman, was a sniper: "They'd post me up front, darn near abroad of the lines." Tragically, one night he mistook their unit scout, Kotz, for the enemy, even though, before acting, he hesitated for ten minutes after spotting the movement in the woods. It is significant that Kotz was from Wisconsin, where Alvin's brother resides: He was a "Polish boy" from "Milwaukee," a "little fellow" who had saved the unit with his reconnaissance work many times. Alvin's guilty secret remained hidden inside him all these years, as everyone thought Kotz was "killed" by German fire. Alvin also expresses his distaste for killing in general, averting that, towards the

end, the Germans were sending "moo-lashed boys" to be killed. His worst regret is "the more years I have, the more they're lost," again, a figurative statement expressing a sentiment with which Verlyn concurs. Thus, Alvin's regret, though focused on his falling out with his brother, Lyle, is inextricably bound to his military experience. It is the mistake about which he can do no more than feel remorse and for which he is to be

pitied. His only relief seems to be when he confesses it at last to a fellow veteran, a sympathetic listener. But notice again the reciprocity—Verlyn has also benefited. The quarrel with Lyle, unlike his accidental shooting of Kotz,

might well be mended, and this is the hope that keeps Alvin going.

This history that Alvin confides to Verlyn is richly discursive and deserves careful scrutiny. Not only do we see that his accidental killing of Kotz has been a hidden canker for some forty years, a guilt it is impossible to assuage, but we also discover that Alvin was made by "a preacher" to understand that his horrific combat experience was the cause of his "mournful taste for liquor" and his "meanness." Neither he, nor the film, suggests that he was an "alcoholic" or that he ever joined Alcoholics Anonymous. In fact, the single beer he enjoys before the final miles of his journey to Lyle indicates great self-control, as Craig Miller and John Thorne suggested (1:52,9). Alvin has suffered from both "survivor guilt" and Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, which is enough in itself to cause anger—with or without alcohol to fuel it.

Another incident that occurs while he is at Clermont also illustrates how Alvin's experience helps others. The Olsen twins, Harold and Thorvald (Keith P. Farley and John Farley) who repair his mower, quarrel so much in front of Alvin when they deliver their bill to him, that he at last fixes his byronic eye upon them and says: "There's no one knows your life better than a brother that's near your own age. He knows who you are and what you are, better than anyone on earth. My brother and I said some unforgivable things last time we saw each other, but I'm tryin' to put that behind me. This trip is a hard swallow of my pride. I just hope I'm not too late. A brother is a brother." Notice that in this scene each of the Olsen twins is mistreating the other, and that Alvin states that both he and Lyle "said some unforgivable things." This suggests that the rift was caused not only by Alvin's behavior, but by Lyle's as well. These riposeous twins seem to take his story to heart, on the strength of the conviction with which Alvin castigates them for their foolishness: perhaps they will avoid their endless, petty quarrels in the future.

The final revelatory moment occurs when Alvin at last crosses the bridge from Iowa to Wisconsin, nearing Mt. Zion and has

goal. That evening, he camps out, curiously, in a cemetery in a country churchyard, another example of frustrated verisimilitude in the film, which insists upon a figurative interpretation. Of all the places to camp, certainly a cemetery would not be a likely first choice, being neither desirable nor practical; in fact, it is probably not even lawful, as must be locked up at night. This isn't just any cemetery, however, but one that contains the remains of an august company, early trappers from the Marquette Expedition, in a house on its grounds dwells a kindly Catholic priest whom Alvin calls "P-dre." The two strike up a conversation and Alvin, learning that the priest was present when Lyle's stroke brought him to the hospital in nearby Escanaba, recounts the parabolic story of their estrangement. "It's a story as old as the Bible. Cain and Abel. Anger, vanity, you mix that with liquor and you've got two brothers who haven't spoken in ten years." Alvin makes a full confession to a right person, even though, he reminds the priest, he is not a Catholic.

Before telling of their falling out, Alvin had related to the priest the fond childhood memories of his love for Lyle when they were growing up on a farm in Moorhead, Minnesota. They worked hard, the winters were cold and the nights long, but their consolation was each other and their shared dreams. They camped in the yard on summer nights: "We'd talk about the stars and whether there might be somebody else like us out in space, and places we'd like to go, and it made our trunks seem smaller. We pretty much talked each other through growing up." Alvin laments their estrangement and confesses: "Whatever it was that made me and Lyle so mad, don't matter anymore. I want to set with him and look up at the stars, like we used to do so long ago." The priest gives his approval: "Well, sir, I say Amen to that." Again, it is important to notice that when Alvin says, "whatever made me and Lyle so mad," he suggests that their estrangement was both of their faults (it takes two to tango). Yet Alvin alone seems willing and/or able to take responsibility for it. At this being the case, it is he who is the peacemaker, the one ready to make the first move to bury the hatchet and reconcile with his brother. The priest's approval approximates the absolution of the confessional.

This scene is so singular as to require an explanation. Again, one must turn to the archetypal redemptive quest pattern. The Mariner, it will be remembered, confesses to a Hermit, a holy man, as soon as he is rescued from the sinking ship on a tempestuous sea. He returns to his land after an arduous journey, but he must confess and be granted absolution before he wanders the earth telling his tale. This pattern of confession originates in the archetype of the medieval quester hero. Perceval, who has literally "forgotten God." He, too, confesses to a Hermit before being given a penance and a second chance to pass the test he failed the first time. Likewise, water crossings and magic bridges are a standard feature of medieval quest narratives. Having crossed

**"The Straight Story challenges us to rethink our assumptions about Lynch's earlier work."**



the perilous bridge and deep waters (like the Mariner), Alvin's journey has nearly reached fruition. Weakened from his arduous journey and perhaps near death (represented figuratively by the cemetery), Alvin has new life within his grasp. When he reconciles with Lyle the next day, the latter also partakes of the spiritual rejuvenation such an act can afford—the implied mutual forgiveness of the final scene representing yet another way in which the film employs the idea of reciprocity. This renewed bond between the brothers, and the final view of the stars with which the film so beautifully concludes, represents the summit of what human beings can attain: spiritual regeneration, forgiveness, and a perpetual capacity to dream.

#### Repetition and Meaning in *The Straight Story*

Decoding a Lynch film can be likened to interpreting a lyric poem, which does not recount a story but rather renders an impression or effect. Thus, its organizing principle is not that of narrative—that is, of a sequence of events told in a causal order. Instead, a lyric poem depends upon patterns of imagery to provide both coherence and meaning, as do the more abstracture of Lynch's films. They are elliptical, relying on the viewer to make meaning through repetition and association of images (an avant garde practice, notably of the surrealists). This method, of course, is in large part what makes Lynch such an idiosyncratic director, and his films both challenging and rewarding.

Although *The Straight Story* is just that—a straight-forward sequence of events that unfold in a recognizable order—the viewer is still asked to interpret the recurring images and motifs in the film. Alvin's is a particular story that occurs under a given set of circumstances, yet interpretation requires that we move beyond those particulars to the archetype upon which it is based—

in this case, that of the quester hero on a redemptive journey. It makes explicit what is only implied in the text itself, often through the signs provided by the artist himself. As Lynch told Chris Rodley about *East Highway*: "I don't like talking about things too much because, unless you're a poet, when you talk about it, a big thing becomes smaller. But the clues are all there for a correct interpretation, and I keep saying this in a lot of ways it's a straight-ahead story. There are only a few things that are a hair off" (xii). Several images in *The Straight Story* link it with previous Lynch films: the auditory and visual imagery of fire, for instance, and the presence of "grotesques," those characters whose function is often obscure, here represented by Dorothy, for example, in the opening sequence, and by the woman who, despite her love for them, keeps killing deer. A few images peculiar to *The Straight Story*, however, deserve special attention.

First and most obvious are the images of and references to deer. There are two John Deere tractor company representatives, both decent human beings—Tom, from whom Alvin buys the used 1966 John Deere for his journey, and Danny Riddon, a retired Deere employee who invites Alvin to "bivouac" in his yard when his mower breaks down. The mysterious stranger who helps Alvin when his engine stalls is driving a John Deere tractor. The film also features the aforementioned episode in which the hysterical Deer Woman (Barbara Robertson) laments her bad luck because she has hit fourteen deer in seven weeks. Alvin makes use of the dead deer, eating it for dinner, as field deer (or stinkos of them) look on. He attaches the deer's antlers to his trailer as a trophy, perhaps as a fond reminder to himself that once, as a boy in the Minnesota woods, he and his family hunted for food.

Another related reference is to Wisconsin, "the party state" where "Cheddarheads," reside in tandem with the legacy of Jesus

missionaries and French trappers. In Alvin's personal history, these two extreme images of Wisconsin represent metonymically the Biblical mystery of Mt. Zion, where Lyle is, and Milwaukee, famous for its beer industry, but also Kotz' home. The Marquette Party, mentioned by the priest in the cemetery, is connected by association with France and Alvin's traumatic war experiences there, but it is also suggestive of trailblazers or pathfinders, as is Alvin, with his covered wagon on the open road. This explorer/pioneering spirit is evocative of Cooper's novel—not Dale Cooper, but James Fenimore Cooper—*The Deerslayer*, which features the archetypal pathfinder or original settler, Natty Bumppo, forged into the American consciousness.

Alvin and Lyle are farmboys from Moorehead, Minnesota, in fact, has experience as a hunter is one of the reasons Alvin is trained as a sniper in WWII. In addition, he is a survivor, a loser, who possesses the stubborn resolve as essential to the pioneer spirit as its balance of pragmatism and idealism. The pragmatic Alvin would rather eat a dead deer than let it go to waste, doubtless, the result of his childhood memories of deprivation, having lived on a farm during the Great Depression; the idealist is a lifelong star-gazer with the perpetual capacity for hope and wonder that is its defining characteristic.

A man of the soil, Alvin is loyal to his machine as men were once loyal to the animals upon which their lives depended. A standard scene in the frontier west is that of the hero who must put his favorite horse out of its misery because it is injured. One memorable scene in the sublime modern day western *Hud* (1963) is when Hud's father, the patriarch, Homer Bannon (Mehyn Douglas), must destroy his entire herd because it has hoof and mouth disease. Public health officials assist in slaughtering the herd, but Homer alone shoots his favorite



Loughran bull, which he has kept as a pet or relic of a dying breed. Something like this grit is apparent in *Alvin* when he insists upon leave his old "Rehds" mower towed back to his home after it fails him on his first attempt to undertake his journey. Oddly, he rides on it in the tow truck, has it parked in his back yard, then resolutely shoots the outdated mower, perhaps out of responsibility and affection rather than rage, as has been suggested. To show determination is not necessarily the same as displaying ill-temper. When he goes to buy a replacement, Tina asks him whether he intends to trade it in, and Alvin replies—rather comically at this point—that he does not. What seems to be yet another quirk in an eccentric character is an indicator of Alvin's strength. Like Homer in *Hud*, he sees things through to the end.

What can *The Straight Story* reveal to us about our own assumptions of Lynch's films? Faithful viewers will, of course, first think of the darkness in his work of evil lurking beneath a veneer of innocence, of tormented characters locked into the many forms hell can take, of the repeated warning that things are seldom what they seem. This is irrefutably true, yet it is equally true that *The Straight Story* emphasizes other dimensions of Lynch's films. First, there is the element that Lynch calls "tenderness." Recall the quote cited by Craig Miller and John Thorne in which, defending *The Straight Story*, Lynch told *The New York Times* that "tenderness can be just as abstract as insanity." Think of the idealistic portrayal of young love, for instance, in *Blue Velvet*, *Twin Peaks*, and *Wild at Heart*.

Another continuity is the expression of grief, for Lynch one of the more authentic or sincere emotions. Grief is a cathartic emotion and, as great dramatists from Sophocles to Arthur Miller have understood, far from leading to pessimism, tragedy points to the unbending idealism of its heroes, implying a qualified hope about the human condition. A number of years ago, when *Twin Peaks* aired, Mark Frost, a guest on the Phil Donahue show, was perplexed by viewers' inability to understand the depiction of genuine grief in the series—that is, to interpret it "straight." This was in reference to what some viewers apparently saw as grotesque exaggeration, or even irony when, upon learning of his daughter's murder, Leland Palmer wore a shocked, horrified face, frozen in grief and horror as he dropped the telephone receiver. Likewise, there was disbelief at the horror expressed on the face of Laura's mother when she awoke from a nightmare, the exaggerated expression showing an indebtedness to the silent cinema. Viewers read as comic that which was evidently in-

tended to be quite sincere. There is considerable humor in Lynch's work. It is true, but certainly in those particular *Twin Peaks* scenes, it would not be plausible.

Grief can be individual and personal, but it can and often is compounded by a genuine nostalgia for a collective loss of innocence, a lament for an earlier mythic time in which America was small town America. This is embodied in the rural life in *The Straight Story*, but reaches back to *Twin Peaks*, with its strange retro feel, a blend of the fifties and eighties; it also informs the conclusion of *Blue Velvet*, even though some must, not without some justification, that this, too, is an ironic undercutting.

There is also the presence of considerable humor, the ability to make us laugh at the absurd in the ordinary, which Lynch raises to the sublime. In our contribution to the special issue on the tenth anniversary of *Twin Peaks*, Sam Umland and I focused on the comic dimension of the series (WTP 46, April 2000, 9-12). Finally, there can be no doubt that David Lynch's films espouse a decided belief in grace, perhaps the most optimistic trait of all. Grace takes many guises, as Craig Miller and John Thorne point out: the divine agency that fires Rennie and Laura's angel at the end of *Fire Walk With Me*; the "Good Witch," who reunites Sailor and Lula at the end of *Wild at Heart*; and the ministering angel in *The Straight Story*.

Have we become so insistent on viewing Lynch through a glass darkly that we cannot accept a film as genuinely his if it features overt optimism? To suggest that Alvin is essentially (and solely) responsible for every tragedy in the backstory (those that are made explicit and those that are decidedly not), far from adding complexity to the film, reduces it to the formula of "wicked man, trivial story." To do so is to do a disservice to the film and to ourselves as well. *The Straight Story*'s title is of course alluding to the hero's name and has irony, but it also suggests that it is the "straight truth," not convoluted or hidden, as complex as that truth may be. Paradoxically, as viewers, we

often try to impose a complexity that the artist himself has tried to reduce to a simpler, more intelligible truth. We recognize this truth because we've heard it before; it resonates in our memory as knowledge transmitted to us through a shared cultural heritage or made known to us through direct experience. As Lynch told Chris Rodley: "We can all relate to almost any kind of human behavior, no matter how bizarre. . . it's in the human behavior box. We all sort of know it" ("Introduction" to *Lost Myphone*, xi).

The simplest truths, presented rightly, are complex enough, as *The Straight Story* makes abundantly clear. Alvin is a story of heroism we can embrace for its faithful portrayal of what is best in the human spirit. Its dreamy conclusion is all the more powerful because it is a tragedy only scarcely—and perhaps not entirely—averted. Happily, Alvin gains wisdom through his suffering and can thus achieve a reintegration into an ordered universe. Salvation is not possible for all of Lynch's characters, but neither is Alvin alone in his success, as others have experienced the redemptive power of love as well (e.g., Henry's vision of his mother in *Eraserhead*, Sailor and Lula and the end of *Wild at Heart*). As Coleridge's close collaborator and fellow romantic poet William Wordsworth understood, a knowledge of evil and suffering augments joy, which is more profound than grief. In his great "Intimations of Immortality Ode," Wordsworth found abundant recompense in "the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering, / In the faith that looks through death, / In the years that bring the philosophic mind." Although the Wordsworth himself a questioner on a redemptive journey, admits that while he "hath kept watch o'er man's mortality: / Another race hath been, and other palms are won." Alvin has been a slow and arduous race, indeed. Yet, most assuredly, his story should uplift us, as we partake of his total abandonment to the joy he experiences at last, sitting with Lyle on the porch of his ramshackle abode, renewing a bond too deep for words, as Alvin's torturous day merits into the blessed night of the stars.

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# Letters

Dear WIP,

I just ran across a golden nugget on my original recording of episode 25 off ABC aired March 28 1991.

A little background. Episode 24 (wherein Josie gets stuck in the drawer pull) was aired February 16th, 1991, two weeks after episode 23. There was a bad wind blowing through the trees of *Twinn Peaks*; the show was about to be canceled. It is my recollection, and if anyone remembers differently please speak up, that it was rumored that the show was to be canceled at the time that episode 24 aired.

Well [the brief] appearance of Bob and the LMFAP; Josie's death and the murder of Thomas Eckhardt, not to mention the introduction of numerous new characters and threads such as John Justice Wheeler, Annie Blackburne, Donna, Shelby and Audrey receiving Windom's poem and the introduction of the Pine Weasel made episode 24 one of the most pivotal of the second season. Upon hearing that episode 24 was most likely the last episode, the fans reacted. No huge internet presence back then, just good old grass roots letters to the network. I wrote a long story myself.

Long story short, ABC aired three episodes and the final 2 hour Sunday Night Movie to be aired. There was a six week void between the airing of episodes 24 and 25 (February 16th to March 28). Yeah, six weeks, folks. It is my contention that Episode 25 marked a change in the narrative. Instead of the "normal introduction to the show beginning with Kyle saying 'Previously on *Twinn Peaks*,' followed by the usual montage of key scenes and character dialogue, we have a new plot device. This introduction is significant, and if it is not contained in the upcoming DVD release, we may in fact call it pre-loss footage.

Two things make it stand out as true *Twinn Peaks* canon, and thus important to understanding the story. One, the use of a "Diane" entry (new dialogue) as an introduction, two, the presentation of new music and imagery used in enhancing and intensifying emotion (the use of visual foreshadowing). The introduction is a "Diane" entry. This is important to me, because it is Cooper dialogue, and a rather straightforward soliloquy at that. The Diane entries showed the essence of Cooper's insights. He is at his best when either receiving or delivering information. Any possible clues to the mystery of *Twinn Peaks* are critical, and the Diane entries were full of clues. Another important aspect of the introduction is that it used footage from an upcoming episode (see the bracketed portions below) at a critical juncture in the dialogue. This is not a

good omen, when viewed with hindsight.

Over the droning spooky Black Lodge music an introspective, pensive (off camera) Dale Cooper speaks to Diane of the recent events in *Twinn Peaks*. Dina the lights and cut the music....

"March twenty-eight, Thursday night. Diane, I want to bring you up to speed on a few recent developments. [Woods at night... flashlight beam in the trees]

"Nadine Hurley, 35 years old, persists in the belief that she is a high school girl. [Nadine at cheerleader tryouts] She has apparently fallen in love with Mike Nelson, high school Varsity star. [Nadine kissing Mike in the RR]

"Word has it that Bobby Briggs has shackled up with Shelby the waitress. [Shelby and Bobby fighting with Leo] Shelby's husband Leo has awakened from his coma and is somewhere in the woods. [Woods at night, flashlight beam in the trees]

"Ben Horne has suddenly become an environmentalist and has enlisted the aid of trusted friend John Justice Wheeler to help him save the Pine Weasel. [Ben unveils the pine weasel sketch] [Woods at night... flashlight beam in the trees]

"As for me, I find myself afflicted with a vague sense of contentment... a premonition of happiness... I hope I will be ready when it comes. [A hazy shot of a boat on the lake, someone's hand lazily reaches down and strokes the water. This is major foreshadowing using footage from upcoming episode 27, when Cooper and Annie are on their future hike, where we learn that this is a false sense of security because Windom is watching with binoculars from afar] [Woods at night, flashlight beam in the trees] Meanwhile, there's Windom Earle, my former partner [Windom wearing Leo] Windom continues to play his deadly game of chess. [Dead vagrant in Sheriff's office] Deadly, Diane, because each time he removes a piece from the board, Earle takes a human life. [Removal of pawn from said vagrant's mouth] I have enlisted the aid of chess champion [chessboard] Pete Martell in hopes of formulating a stalemate game. In the meantime I can only wait for Earle's next move. [Donna, Audrey, and Shelby put their pieces of Earle's poem together]

"Major Briggs has returned from his disappearance in the woods, but remembers nothing. [The Major in his inmate outfit] He can't explain the mysterious tattoo on his neck. [Close up of tattoo]

"Diane, Josee Packard is dead. [Harry holding Josee on the bed] Possibly from fear, and while I am absolutely certain that she tried to take my life. I feel both sadness and even sympathy. Sheriff Truman is

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suffering terribly. When Josie died I saw a vision revealing Bob [vision of Bob] and the midgit [vision of midgit] from my dream. [Windom Earle, Bob, the midgit—are there a connection Dime? Do these events foreshadow Bob's return? [Josie getting stuck in the drawer pull] I hope not. For all our sakes."

I thought that [this might be significant].  
Sean Lombardo  
San Diego CA  
e-mail

Your description of Cooper's recap of the series is fun to read, Sean, but we shouldn't be too quick to label it as "true *Twinn Peaks* canon." Yes, it is conveyed to the audience as a "Diane" entry, and therefore Cooper dialogue. But the show's producers were keen on getting the audience back up-to-speed after a six-week hiatus, and they likely felt a "Cooper" recap would be more effective than a simple, "previously on *Twinn Peaks*" recap. We've always dismissed the recap as non-canon simply because it gets the date wrong. Cooper says the date is March 28 (the date the episode aired) but in *Twinn Peaks* time, the date is March 22. So, despite Cooper's descriptions, this recap was intended for the TV audience, not for Diane.

Hey gang,  
As always, loved the latest WIP (#59), but I have to point out a few things.

Re: Elephant Man DVD 1.85:1 is not an anamorphic format. The film is shot full frame and then masked. Anamorphic refers only to the process in which the image is squeezed onto the film with a special lens and then unsqueezed when projected in order to create the super-wide 2.35:1 aspect ratio. However, not all 2.35:1 films are anamorphic. Titanic, for instance, used Super-35, which is the same kind of process as 1.85:1—film is shot full-frame and then masked to create the widescreen. The benefit of Super-35 over anamorphic widescreen is that the film can be unmasked when presented in 1.33:1 (your TV screen) thus providing more headroom without sacrificing as much as you would in normal pan-and-scan.

Re: *Twinn Peaks* pilot DVD and Dunham's commentary that the fish in the precolator scene was inspired by his kids putting hot dogs in the coffee water. What? Anyone who's seen *Pretty As A Picture* knows that this was in fact inspired by an incident that happened to Lynch himself in which a bar of Lava soap had been left in a coffee precolator when the coffee was made.

Re: Short Films DVD. *The Armutator* is from a video transfer because Eliaz had

been changed with testing two different types of videotape, not two kinds of film stocks.

Re: *Blue Velvet* DVD. You missed the third Easter egg. Access it by going to the scene selection menu. Between the box for scene 3 and scene 4, you will find a blue ear. Push play and you get Kyle MacLachlan telling where the chicken walk came from. Cheers, all.

Mark Steensland  
e-mail

We referred to *The Elephant Man* DVD as anamorphic because the image on the DVD is "enhanced for 16:9 TVs." We mistakenly described the image as 1.85:1, when the image is actually 2.35:1. As noted above, we've seen *Pretty as a Picture* but forgot about the soap story.

Dear WIP,

I just finished reading your "Dreams Of Deer Meadow" article and thought it was an exceptionally insightful and cohesive way of understanding *Fire Walk With Me*. If there is a "primary" intention behind Lynch's final cut of the film, I would have to say that this is the most convincing theory I've heard so far.

One clue I wanted to add to your article was the very name that the dreaming Cooper gave himself in his dream: Chet Desmond. We can see that the initials of this "dream character" are simply the same as Dale Cooper's (D.C.), only reversed (C.D.).

This strikes me as another significant piece of evidence to suggest that the Chet Desmond character is simply a revision of the Dale Cooper character. Dreams, as we know, are often culled from reality—things that have happened to us that then get bent or distorted in our dreams.

Hence, Dale is re-interpreting his investigation with his "actual" investigation as the reference material. Therefore, the Chet Desmond character is not only familiar to us as a physically similar character (black hair, slicked back), but even in name.

A faithful reader,  
Rodney Smith  
e-mail

We're pretty sure that somewhere, at some time, we've mentioned C.D. (Chet Desmond) as the reverse of D.C. (Dale Cooper), but, you know, after sixty issues, it's hard to find these things! We are certain that it formed the basis of our question to Robert Engels in WIP 58 about Deer Meadow being the "anti-Twin Peaks" (note that it immediately follows questions about Chet Desmond).

Craig and John,

Just recently finished your article about FWMM's Deer Meadow prologue. Your theory that it's all Cooper's dream is quite brilliant, holds together well, and should make lots of your readers very happy. But...

I reject it. I reject it because I don't feel any need for it. The first thirty minutes of *Fire Walk With Me* are probably my favorite half hour in any film, and accepting your

take on it would honestly spoil the magic for me. Taken as "reality," I find the prologue to be mysterious, incredibly intriguing, and a whole lot of fun. I actively enjoy trying to piece together all my little theories about how the supernatural elements "work." After finishing your essay, I sat and thought about the prologue as a dream, and the whole film suddenly seemed less interesting to me. It felt like a cop out. So my own search for answers will continue. Now you may wonder how I can possibly still think of Deer Meadow as reality in the face of all your evidence: how your facts can come across as just another theory to me. All I can say is that each time you cited a specific moment from the film as proof, my response was not "yeah!" but "yeah, maybe." All the instances of doubling and references to sleep just seem like business-as-usual for Lynch to me. I don't find them any stranger than half of the everyday occurrences in the town of Twin Peaks throughout the series.

I agree that your explanation creates a greater sense of balance to the film as a whole, but any lack of balance has never affected my enjoyment of FWMM one bit. If anything, the off-kilter nature of the prologue compared to what follows is part of its appeal for me and just adds to the overall feeling of mystery. Let's face it, you've been calling FWMM Lynch's best film for years, long before publishing this article, so you can't argue that anyone needs to accept your new take on it. Hope I'm not sounding too negative. It is a very cool article and my hat's off to anyone who now feels you've uncovered the solution, but you failed to convince me that your solution is irrefutable. So I won't be kicking Agents Desmond and Jefferson off the stage just yet. I would miss them too much.

As an interesting aside, part of your FWMM explanation is remarkably similar to my own Mulholland Drive theories. I believe otherworldly beings intrude into Diane's dream. I see Club Silencio as a real, Red Room-sort of place that can be accessed in dreams. The bum (or, as I call him, the Thing Behind The Diner) is a force of evil similar to Bob, while the Blue Lady and The Cowboy are a bit more neutral, kind of like the LMFP. (For that matter, I see *Lost Highway*'s Mystery Man as a Bob-type of force, too. I like to think of the three films as a kind of trilogy that explores similar supernatural ideas.)

On another note entirely, have either of you ever seen Mario Bava's *Kill Baby... Kill*? I saw it a month or two ago and there's a moment in it near the end that almost made me scream out "Holy Crap!" in the middle of a crowded theater. The scene in question seemed almost identical to the moment in the final TP episode when Cooper loops through the same room again and again and his Doppelgänger catches up to himself. I'll bet you my firstborn that Lynch saw this movie and recalled the image when he was shooting the finale. Unfortunately, I wasn't in a position to reward the film and do a comparison, but I know it's available on DVD, so you might want to check it out

sometime if you can. Could be worth an article.

Jon Naquist  
e-mail

Thanks for your thoughtful reply, Jon. We're glad you liked the essay and respect your opinion about rejecting it. We never intended to "solve" the film, only supply a more coherent explanation for some of its oddities.

If we read your analysis correctly, you believe there is an explanation that will make all the pieces "fit"—but this isn't it. Fair enough. But it is important to remember how David Lynch was constructing the film (both before and after *Mulholland Drive*). We don't think he would have chosen a dream approach if he could have made the film exactly as he had planned. (Same goes for *Mulholland Drive*). However, the artist in Lynch could not allow a disjointed and incomplete film to exist, so he took this dream approach (again, in our opinion). Although Lynch is so often accused of being ambiguous, we believe closure and self-containment are very important concepts to him. In fact, we'd say they are vital to him. Lynch is a rigorous filmmaker whose films really are neat (that is, "tidy") and complete. With that in mind we believe FWMM must have some sort of coherence. Given that Lynch has so often re-worked existing material into dream narratives (both before and after he shot FWMM), it is easy (though arguably a "cop out" on our part) to adopt this interpretation.

We, too, enjoy the puzzles of the prologue (and the rest of the film). But after studying the film for so long and with such intensity (we have studied FWMM more than any other movie) we found ourselves frustrated and even despairing over the contradictory nature of the film (especially when it comes to the Owl Cave ring). We realized that we were trying too hard to make the film work.

Then we realized two very important things: 1) Lynch, himself, did not know how the film worked until he was editing it (and maybe not even then). 2) Lynch told viewers—explicitly—that (at least part of) the film was a dream. We (finally) took those words at face value.

Anyway, as you say, we hope we do not sound too negative about your reply. We're not. But we don't think we will ever see a comprehensive theory that will "solve" FWMM (again, because Lynch changed his mind about so much as he shot and edited it).

Hello Craig and John:

I found your article concerning the FWMM Deer Meadow "dream prologue" extremely well written and thought-provoking. While I am not completely convinced that Chester Desmond is the dream-self of Dale Cooper (although their initials invert respectively), "Dreams of Deer Meadow" raises a few questions I would like to have answered: 1. In addition to the Terrest Banks

prologue, do you believe there are other instances in the TP storyline that have been misconstrued as "reality" rather than interpreted as a dream of Agent Cooper, thus accounting for the chaotic nature the storyline takes immediately following Cooper's entering Glendonbury Grove the Black Lodge in the final episode?

To counterpoint, does Cooper's words in the series' final scene, "I wasn't sleeping," bear any significance?

2. Since you suggest that the "dream prologue" is the result of Agent Cooper's failure to solve the initial Banks murder, would you therefore propose that Cooper advising Diane that the Laura Palmer case go to Albert Rosenfield rather than Sam Stanley is a result of the Deer Meadow dream?

3. Assuming your dream theory is correct, does Phillip Jeffries' "Judy" reference in the prologue suggest an entirely new meaning? Like Cooper's Diane, Judy is a character mentioned but never seen. She is mentioned several times by Jeffries in the "dream prologue" and once more at the close of the film in which we hear "Judy" dubbed over the shot of the monkey's face just before the end credits.

Would you say that this final inclusion of "Judy" in FWWM is Lynch's final reminder of the importance of dreams in Twin Peaks?

Once again, thanks for sharing an intriguing perspective as always. I would be equally interested in reading WIP's interpretation of the presence of Red Room themes (the Owl Cave ring, the Arroyo's "Let's Rock" graffiti) throughout the Deer Meadow prologue. Dream or no dream, do these themes serve as a clue to the nature of the One-Armed Man, Phillip "Mike" Gennard, who in

the film drives an RV, a sort of mobile home, and does this lend significance to Laura recognizing Deputy Cliff Howard, resident of Fox Trout trailer park, as "Mike"? Is it possible that they are one and the same? I would love to hear what other readers think of this suggestion.

Thanks and keep it up,  
Dylan X  
Missoula Correspondent  
e-mail

Dylan, we hope to address many of your question in future essays and in the letters pages of WIP. But for now, here are some brief answers:

1) We really need to think about this! There are some intriguing possibilities here. In one Lynch-directed episode, Jerry Horne asks, "Is it real, or some twisted dream?"

2) Not a result of the dream, but the result of his memory! We believe Cooper really did go to Deer Meadow with Sam Stanley (you just saw the dream version of that case).

3) We will have much to say about Judy in the future. We believe Lynch had to re-think the identity of Judy as FWWM became a different film. (Robert Engels tells us she was originally supposed to be Jesse's sister!) Who is Judy? In re-studying the film recently, we've begun to formulate some theories, but we haven't worked them out completely yet, so they will come in a later issue.

Dear WIP,

It might interest you to check out [www.thewilmas.com](http://www.thewilmas.com). I have lived in Lynch-hometown Missoula for several years now, and during the first year of my residence I lived on the seventh floor of The Wilmas, which is an Opera House/apartment complex built in the 1920's. It is a fantastic old building, which is currently going through an impressive remodeling. The owner previous to the current owners was reportedly obsessed with his pet dove, and upon its death, created a shrine in its honor, which now rests in a hip-hop lounge on the first floor of the building, named "The Temple of the Dove."

Local Missoula legend says The Wilmas was the inspiration for Dorothy Vallens' apartment in Blue Velvet. It is interesting to note, however that there is no apt 710. Furthermore, it is said that the director even lived there, although I have yet to confirm this. Pictures of the building are available on the aforementioned Web site, although they hardly do it justice. As for the films shown in the theatre, they are usually art-oriented, since Missoula already has a megaplex for the Hollywood trash.

The latest Lynch film shown was "Blue Velvet," right around

the time that "Mulholland Drive" was showing as well. I will keep you posted as to whether or not a definitive "Lynch Fest," which has been talked about, ever happens.

I'm glad you printed Sedona's letter in WIP 60 chronicling the sampling of Lynch material in recorded music. While I'm not sure what was mentioned concerning the band Mr. Bungle in WIP #54, Mr. B. Giguere/producer Trey Spruance had this to say concerning sampling "Blue Velvet," when I interviewed him in November 1999:

"That's kind of a long story. There was a roommate of mine who was actually in the middle of sort of flipping out during the time that we were recording [that record] [self-titled debut], and he started getting really obsessive about that film... doing these big storyboard and making these huge art projects about it. He was hanging out in the studio at the time. His sort of obsessive thing sort of took us over a little bit during that."

If you have not listened to Mr. Bungle's first record, I recommend doing so, if only for the extensive use of "Blue Velvet" references.

As a high school senior, I talked with either you or Craig via telephone around the time of the TP 5th anniversary issue. I was told that in the future you planned to compile a WIP annual, reprinting the early articles in a compendium format. Will this project ever come to fruition? I know I would love to read the long out-of-print Al Sirobel interview from WIP #11 again.

Anyway, thanks for an intelligent magazine.

Dylan X  
Missoula Correspondent  
e-mail

As noted last issue, we learned during the publication of Spectrum Super Special this summer (collecting five years' worth of our Buffy the Vampire Slayer-related material) that these compilation issues are a lot more work than we thought because we're obsessive about fixing all the little (and sometimes major) mistakes that crept (or plopped) into the original printings. We still want to do it, though, but aren't even sure of the best format. Should we just reprint the main features from, say, issues 1-10 in a single package, or should we divide things up by topic—an interview collection, an "Unseen Twin Peaks" collection, a feature articles collection, a Twin Peaks Festival collection, a Twin Peaks International Report collection, etc. If anyone wants to voice his or her preference of formats, we'd love to hear from you.

And speaking of Buffy the Vampire Slayer:

Dear Craig and John,  
I want to say that I have been reading *Wrapped in Plastic* since issue 56, and I really enjoy the magazine. I just finished iss

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61, and it was another stellar issue. Regarding my "Unseen WIP" article, you don't have to apologize for it. I did get a lack out of it.

As for what will replace NF ["X-Files Extra"], why not a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* feature? I know you cover the Buffster in *Spectrum*, but I think the show deserves its place alongside the work of David Lynch. Maybe you could do an article on the various *Buffy* Web sites.

Also, why not do a review of *The Ring* starring Naomi Watts?

Do you ever come to Austin for any of the film fests? Try to come to Austin Heart of Film Screenwriter Conference next fall, and I'll see if you can run a panel discussion on film criticism.

Regards,  
Richard Billingsley  
e-mail

John has seen only a few episodes of *Buffy*, but Craig is a huge *Buffy* fan—some of those episodes thrill him every bit as much as the better episodes of *Twin Peaks* and *Homicide: Life on the Street*. However, we prefer to keep the *Buffy* material in *Spectrum*. We'd love to produce more material about the series, but there simply isn't enough of a link between *Buffy* and Lynch's work to make it a logical back-up feature in *WIP*.

We haven't reviewed *The Ring* simply because we haven't had a chance to get out to see it! But we are certainly eager to check it out.

Hey John & Craig,

I had just reached the *Twin Peaks* reference in Alan Moore's excellent *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* when it struck me to open up the just-out *WIP* 61 and found that, indeed, someone is a faster reader/writer than I and had beaten me to notifying you about it in the "Letters" section.

It was then I remembered I had a few things to gripe about. (This was easy, as I always have a few things to gripe about.) Hopefully it will be perceived as constructive criticism. Don't fret; I'm not gonna go all John Thorne-24 on you (which has already become a catchphrase in my household. Okay, it actually hasn't).

Your assessment on how the opening section to *FWWM* could be perceived as a dream, à la *Mulholland Drive*, was excellently written. However, unlike the splendid job you did in interpreting the last episode of the series, this time, I just couldn't buy it. I can understand how one could pick a pattern out of the "dream vs. reality" motif from *Drive*, possibly *Lost Highway*, maybe *Blue Velvet*, etc., and then extend this to a notion that, when Lynch indicated *FWWM* was most experimental film, it was in reference to this Cooper-as-Desmond-within-a-dream theory.

I would suggest, however, that what appears on screen as simply the result of a baffling editing job performed on an already existing portion of the story. Yes, certain

sequences don't "live" with the rest of *TP*—Albert witnessing Jeffries' disappearance, for starters. Well, I could describe at length why the entire sequence, to me, doesn't have to be a dream in order for it to make *FWWM* "work" (or, work "better"), but let's stick with Albert.

First, as you noted, in the script, Cole does order Albert out of the room at this point. Granted, this tidbit isn't obvious on screen. Then again, there isn't a whole hell of a lot in this sequence that is obvious. It is "possible" that Albert went to check with the front desk, looked behind him, and has shoe, or other ridiculous notions that might have made him miss Jeffries' vanishing act. (Cole's voice-over hollering "He's gone!" may indicate only Cole saw him vanish.)

Yet, that would be silly. What isn't silly is the thought that perhaps Albert did catch the whole show. Just because he is belliger-



*Buffy in Wrapped in Plastic? It's a great show, but...*

ent and displays a caustic take on Cooper's methods, maybe he still was witness to the unreal happenings in Cole's office and simply doesn't know how to process them. And as the show progressed, his character did gain a more serene, heartfelt acceptance of all-things-no-Rosenfeld. What sticks out is when he encourages Cooper to "walk the path" or however that beautiful speech went, indicating he's familiar with Cooper's gifts and perhaps has borne witness to them in the past.

What I'm getting at is, it's not inconsistent in his character to have seen the unbelievable and still purport himself like an ass: witness *The X-Files*'s Scully and Doggett! (Or, don't!) Obviously it would have been impossible for Albert to have had a first- or second-season moment where he blurts out "Cripes, Coop! This is just like that freaky David Bowie-looking guy in Gordon's office!" Yet, again, I would fault the confusing and possibly limited editing choices Lynch and Mary Swerney faced in that sequence, rather than chalking it up to a dream.

More importantly to me, though, is that this scene contains the chilling moment of both Cooper looking at himself on the monitor, and Jeffries' pointing to Coop, asking the agnais, "Who do you think this is there?" That has indicated, and will always indicate to me, that this is Cooper as Bob, and this is

the one moment, the only clue, courtesy of Jeffries, of Cooper's fate. (While acknowledging Annie's "dream" conversation to Laura about the "Good Dile," it seems uncertain if she did write in her diary regarding Annie.)

Hence, if *TP* had ever been able to continue, Cole and Albert (and possibly others) may have had some sort of epiphany regarding Jeffries' earlier visit, or perhaps even a repeat visitation that would have provided more insight into Cooper's state. (I can't imagine Lynch passing up using the "time travel" abilities of the Lodge to have hunted at Cooper's future so early on in the game; I believe in Lynch on *Lynch* he makes similar comments regarding Annie's visit, which again is witnessed only by a soon-to-be dead girl.)

And now, for the constructive criticism (groan). At first, I didn't particularly enjoy the Robert Engels interview in *WIP* 58. Perhaps it played differently "on the day," but the way the interview read, Engels appeared to ad libly respond to any question thrown at him, without seeming to instill much insight on his own. I just couldn't shake the impression that it might have made for a more interesting read if Engels had presented the facts as he remembered them, rather than placing these long-held rumors in front of him, and he elaborating or responding to them, etc.

In particular, as much as *WIP* questions the validity of "David Lynch's 10 Clues" re: "*Mulholland Drive*," I would be very surprised to learn that a character in *FWWM* was named "Judy" simply because it was Engels' sister-in-law's name.

This is about as non-Lynch an occurrence as I've ever heard; in fact, continuing with my obvious obsession with the Cooper/Jeffries scene, the "Judy" moniker to me is one of the central mysteries of the film, for which I have my own, deeply held (and even more wordily) notions about. It's not simply a case of me being "disappointed by the truth." I actually can't accept that explanation as "truth."

Later, I dug up the Engels interview and skimmed it again as best I could. Your questions were much more broad and thorough than I had remembered. I also can't fault Engels for half-remembering (or otherwise) something that had taken place so many years before. My frustration, I suppose, arose from finally having one of the two people responsible for the *FWWM* script available for questioning, and maybe he just didn't provide the answers I was looking for.

Realistically, I suppose, there's no other way to bring up that "planet of corn" rumor, than to flat-out state "About the planet of corn..." I guess that, when I first heard about that Engels lecture, his comments struck me as a bunch of malarkey (and the fact that Lynch, who is so secretive, would collaborate with someone providing these kinds of "reasons" seemed fishy), and his more recent discussions of the storyline didn't go far into making me more of a "believer."

I still don't accept that Lynch would

choose Judy, of all names, simply for the reason that it was Angela's sister-in-law. I mean, "Hello?" Judy? Wizard of Oz? Talking monkey???? Sighs. Well, that's an article I've been (thunking about) writing for ten years now; perhaps when my one-year-old son is ready for college, I'll have time for it.

In the meantime, keep to your fantastic efforts, and I'll occasionally lob some embarrassingly incorrect complaint at them in hope that something sticks.  
Robert "24" Wolpert  
e-mail

Thanks for your thoughts, Robert. We always enjoy hearing from you. We should note to readers that the above is actually two of Robert's letters that we condensed and "smooched" together to form a single missive that we hope flows seamlessly from topic to topic.

We'll also note that we interviewed Engels twice, and that while he may not have "provided the answers" some readers were looking for, our impression was that he was trying his best to answer things that addressed details from over a decade ago and sometimes simply couldn't remember—completely understandable.

Dear WIP,

Thanks to your feature in WIP 60, we may now confidently view our trip to Deer Meadow as an episode in Cooper's dreaming mind and see Agent Desmond as Cooper's alter. The instances of doubling and the blue rose are well-accounted for as artifacts of a dream, as you stated. The ring's importance to the first half of FWWM comes from Cooper's dreaming intuition, in his surrogate form as Desmond, and to understand the ring would be to break the encoding of Teresa's murder. Rather than clutter this letter, I have posted a list of links to various relevant texts, excerpts, and discussions, which may be accessed by searching Google.com for <WIPurIs trichome>.

For years, fans have struggled with the scarcity of information about the blue rose and the Owl Cave ring. The rose is not magical, but it stands for something mysterious. The ring appears in dreams, visions, and reality, and it has hints of unnamed power. I'd like to further your discussion on these two elements from the prequel's prologue, with clues from Laura's last seven days and from the series, which lead me to satisfying conclusions about the ideas symbolized by the ring and the rose.

Before we learned of a green ring, owls

made various appearances in the series, especially in Owl Cave. We identified the owl pictograph on the ring as that found on the rock which, when turned by Earle, brought forth the petroglyph. We saw Bob superimposed over an owl, and Leland booted in his madness. From a radio signal out of the woods of Twin Peaks, and from the Giant, Cooper was told that "the owls are not what they seem."

Leland is the one who was not what he seemed. He had two faces, and his evil threatened to perpetuate itself by making a molestation owl out of Laura as well. Worn on the finger, the ring—like Leland—also has two orientations and may point the wings of the owl as either soaring "vOr" or swooping down "vO~" to make a meal out of a little brown mouse. The owl is a carnivorous predator, and one unlikely-seeming definition for "palmar" (with two "a"s) is "pertaining to the under side of the wings of birds." The owl icon carved into the green stone marks the ring as a token of encounters with owls. Cooper's detective training made him, through Desmond, ask, "Why was the ring important enough for the killer to remove it from Teresa's body?" Leland may well have given Teresa that ring as a fond remembrance of their nesting time together—an

was an owl's prey long before she wore the ring.

For plot purposes, the ring was the sole piece of physical evidence that triggered Laura's realization about Teresa's murder. Leland, and Bob, As the One Armed Man demanded Bob return his garmonbozia, Laura broke through her traumatic amnesia and reclaimed ownership of her pain and suffering by identifying Bob (and Leland, as Bob's host); further, she avoided becoming another host, herself.

I do not mean to imply that Laura knew any of these details about the symbolism of owls. But when Laura took the ring she was professing to her abuser that her greatest motivation in the face of death was breaking through the post-traumatic amnesia of her serial-incest victimization, to finally free herself from Bob's power by allowing her to name and damn Bob/Leland. If Bob had expected Laura to forget that night (as she had repressed the memory of so many others), seeing the ring forced Bob to re-examine his murder of Teresa, knowing that Laura could no longer be compelled to keep silent.

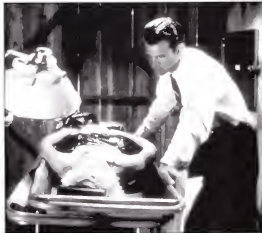
When Laura took the ring, she was not wishing for death, neither was she surrendering herself to Bob in some twisted marriage. Taking the ring meant that Laura had become aware of this duality—to know that a molester may masquerade as a father. Becoming fully conscious of the molestation likely ensures that one will not become a manipulator and molester in future relationships, which is what Bob wanted from Laura—to have her become another host and instrument for him to use, to breathe through her nose and taste through her mouth.

Your essay follows the more traditional belief that taking the ring makes one vulnerable to Bob, but this is not precisely true. Teresa was in jeopardy because she attempted to blackmail Leland, and Laura marked herself as a witness who had to die by showing Bob the ring. I think Cooper's intuition that the ring was evil was not entirely valid. He, and most viewers, have seen

accepting the ring as negative. The ring did not bring Bob upon Laura, rather it was Laura's key in repossessing her garmonbozia, her last rites of purification.

But what of the blue rose? I think to understand this empty-seeming symbol, we must determine the most important element of the Twin Peaks story. What (or who) is most deserving of an explicit, but encoded, symbol?

As the Log Lady told us in her introduction to the pilot, "Twin Peaks is a story of



Chet Desmond (Chris Isaak)—Cooper's dream?

Owl and his surrogate daughter/wife.

For the purposes of plot, any ring could have sufficed to tell Laura that Leland had murdered Teresa. Why use a ring showing a two-faced, predatory owl? "With this [owl] ring, I thee wed." But to what exactly would one be wedding? What does it mean to choose to be symbolically finger-bound in a relationship? What we must recognize is that the relationship predates the donning of the ring, which serves as the acknowledgement of that relationship. Laura

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money, but begins with one—and I knew her. The one leading to the money is Laura Palmer. Laura is the one." Laura's tragic loss of life at her full young blossom is what Gordon Cole signified with Lil's blue, lifeless, plume flower—cat drugs, UFOs, the paranormal, or any such comparatively shallow nonsense.

It's true that no blue rose is mentioned after the Deer Meadow and Philadelphia prologue, but the shooting draft for the film (available on-line) contains two scenes in which a red rose is featured. In several pages deleted from the theatrical release, Laura, Donna, and her parents share a tender conversation about Laura's need for cigarettes and Ellen's huckleberry muffins. Doc Hayward fails to perform a magic trick that would produce a red rose, then struggles to read from a prescription. This scene appeared to me not to cohere particularly, aside from the Hayward domestic bliss serving as a contrast to the Palmer household's secret incest tension. If you look beyond what the characters understand about the scene, to what topics Lynch and Engels were toying upon, you may observe a scientific subtext to the scene. The science behind smoking cigarettes and eating huckleberries have some color behind them: the carbon monoxide in cigarettes will double a heavy smoker's load of red blood cells (in order to compensate for the lack of oxygen), while anthocyanins are powerful antioxidants native to a variety of blueberries. Laura's cravings for nicotine and additives demand that she smoke, which the Doc permits because he loves her too much to make her stop. While Laura's habit is to dump damaging free-radicals into her bloodstream, her surrogate mother Ellen tenderly counters with a healthy muffin "with seven full huckleberries" inside each one. Laura and Donna debate which one of them is "the muffin," a playful name with both innocent and sexual connotations.

The metaphor of Doc's eyes stars, trying to read his own medical handwriting, and his failure to produce his magic red rose are parallel to his inability to stand firm as a parent and a doctor and make Laura put out that damn cigarette. Indeed, he could not do anything at all to save Laura. He was virtually her uncle, literally the man who delivered her into the world, yet he couldn't even recognize incest as his best friend's family.

When later, in the middle of the dark Twin Peaks forest, Laura leapt off of James's motorbike at the traffic light at Sparkwood and 21, heading toward debauchery and her death, Doc Hayward's red rose was meant to be visible by the side of the road. Laura was still alive, but the flower in this version was wilted. By morning, Laura would be blue and bloodless on the lake shore, the Homecoming Queen wrapped up like a bouquet of cold flowers. (If you think back to the first moment you see Laura's blue, plastic-wrapped body, you can easily imagine a bouquet of flowers.)

I see the establishing shot of Teresa floating down the river and the introduction of the blue rose at the start of FWWM as a

restatement of that metaphor: Laura was the rose of Twin Peaks. The townsfolk loved her happy and beautiful appearance, but like a clipped rose she suffered in order to delight her abusive father.

Apart from the compassionate, heartbroken reference to Bob's cyanotic young victims, the blue rose also served to remind the dreaming Cooper to keep an eye out for some anomaly during Teresa's investigation. He wouldn't specifically know what to look for, but he would pay the strictest attention when he noticed something that didn't quite jibe with his knowledge of human behavior. That a worthless ring should be missing was incompatible with the motives implied by the rest of the evidence. The implication was that the ring had a connection to the killer, else why steal a trinket? To discover the ring would have led to questions about who bought it, where, and when. Leland/Bob needed to remove Teresa's ring to cover his tracks.

So you can see, the "blue rose" that Cooper (Chet) was looking for in his dream, the hope to recognize an unknown clue, turned out to be the Owl Cave ring. The "rose" told Cooper (as Desmond) that he had to find the one clue that would link Teresa to her killer. When Stanley asked Desmond if he was going back for the blue rose, Desmond was, indeed, going back for Teresa (i.e., the blue rose)—"for" in the sense of "on her behalf." Desmond went to Fat Trout and found a ring on a mound under a trailer before the overlapping EM wave-forms from the tangle of electrical wires up on the pole interfered with the neuro-electric activity of Cooper's acetylcholine-fired dream, joining his mind out of Deer Meadow, and into another dream in Philadelphia.

Christian Hartleben  
e-mail

Hi Guys,

Just read your article on TP-FWWM (had to wait until I could watch the film again first). Your reading of the prologue as the same sort of dream version of "real-life" events that we later see in *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* makes a lot of sense to me (though I think it's a lot messier and more perplexing in FWWM, as though Lynch was still working out how to signal to the viewer how to interpret things). I do have one question that you didn't address in your essay, and I'll just throw it out there for you or your readers to speculate on:

Doesn't David Bowie's character, somewhere in his incoherent gibbering during his brief appearance at Philadelphia headquarters, say something like, "Don't even ask about Judy! This has nothing to do with her?" It's an utter non sequitur (that connects with nothing else in the film (or, as far as I can remember, the whole TV series) until the very last spoken line in the movie, when (in a moment that reminds me strongly of the Norma Desmond-looking lady in the box seat who whispers, "Silence!" at the end of *Mulholland Drive*) that scary little boy in the suit who looks like a young David Lynch removes his blank pointy-nosed plaster mask

to reveal the dark, fearful face of a baboon, which—I'm pretty sure of this—utters the name, "Judy."

Am I imagining this? Does the name "Judy" refer to anything that any of your readers can recall in Lynch's whole oeuvre? The whole thing seems so arbitrary and creepy that I keep imagining it must be the name of a woman David Lynch secretly killed decades ago and longs to make amends to or beg forgiveness from. More comforting interpretations would be welcome.

Tim Kreider  
e-mail

P.S.: FYI, my essay on A.I. should be appearing in the Winter issue of *Film Quarterly*. I've also co-authored (with Boyd White) a piece on *A Simple Plan* and *Spider-Man* that they may or may not accept.

John replies:

*Thanks for your letter about the FWWM essay. In a way, you are the inspiration for the piece. After reading your Straight Story essay, I was determined to look at FWWM with a fresh perspective and to try to look beyond the surface story being told in the film.*

*I have given much thought to Judy. This was one of a couple of subjects that had to be deleted from my final draft because they were tangential. Anyway, according to Robert Engels (co-writer of FWWM), Judy was supposed to be Josie Packard's sister, and would have been a character he and Lynch would have developed had they had more time in the film—or if they made more TP films. I have a theory about how Lynch's idea about Judy's identity changed during the course of writing, filming, and editing the movie (much as his ideas about the Deer Meadow sequence changed). For next issue, Craig and I are going to try to get all our thoughts organized on the topic and get something in print. Stay tuned!*

*Some suggest that Judy is a reference to Judy Garland. In fact, Major Briggs mentions Judy Garland in the series, and, of course, we have numerous references to The Wizard of Oz in Wild at Heart and in deleted material from Blue Velvet.*

*I'm looking forward to your A.I. piece. I will say that I am not a fan of the film—at all. I saw it only once, but I think Spielberg fumbled it, big time. I hated the ending, which betrayed the science fiction premises of the film. And I thought the robot-destruction circus scene failed in almost every way. (The audience turns on the emcee not because they think he is destroying a robot who looks like a boy, but because they think he is about to kill a real boy. In the end, the audience remains a cruel and bigoted public, although I think Spielberg wanted to imply they were changing their ways.) I think the real story to be found in A.I. would have been one about the mother and her feelings about her two "sons."*

*I'm curious to read your thoughts. If you defend the film, I'm sure it will cause*



me to rethink my take on the movie.

Craig replies:

One more note about A.I. (since we never found the time to write the review we'd hoped to write for *Spectrum*). I was not as disappointed with A.I. as John was (John would become downright angry at the movie as we would discuss it), but I thought it was really bad, and I have been looking forward to your review ever since you hinted a year or two ago that you might write about it. Based on what little information I've been able to learn about Stanley Kubrick's original vision for the movie, I'm convinced one of the major themes was going to be the relationship between love and sex. Most of Kubrick's films address some aspect of sex (something I didn't realize until assembling the material for

the Kubrick articles in WIP 47 and *Spectrum* 20 and 21), and as I thought about some of the issues suggested by A.I., I was sure this would have been a significant part of Kubrick's movie. But Spielberg—perhaps because he wanted to make the movie PG-13, perhaps because he didn't have the same thematic interests as Kubrick, perhaps for any number of other reasons—smoothed over these potentially fascinating issues in favor of a more “audience-pleasing” film about a cute kid experiencing some problems and having some adventures. Spielberg squandered an opportunity to make a great film.

John,

Or maybe the mysterious name “Judy” points to another, unknown girl in the “Blue Rose” series of cases, victims of the demon

Bob—one before Teresa, or one after Laura. There's always another case.

I did like A.I., but I don't think your criticisms are off-base, and in fact that moment where the crowd turns against the MC at the “Flesh Fair” was one of the most problematic in the film for me. It rings false in the context of the rest of the film—a stereotypical Spielberg moment in what's otherwise a pretty unrelentingly bleak depiction of human nature. Tim Kreider e-mail

Others have suggested the theory about Judy's being an earlier victim, and it's intriguing, though we're not convinced the film ultimately provides sufficient evidence.



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# The World Spins

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## TP on Screen

How time flies. We haven't done a TV-appearance update since WIP 58—last April's issue! So bang on; there's a lot to cover. Next issue we'll tackle the magazine appearances.

**David Lynch** made a brief appearance on *The Tonight Show* on March 25 as he was interviewed by "the annoying intern Ross" at the Academy Awards ceremony.

On April 16, the Independent Film Channel presented *Independent Focus: David Lynch*, in which the director was interviewed by Elvis Mitchell. (We assume this has aired before, but this was the first time we had seen it.) The interview seemed familiar—and sure enough, it was the event reported on by John Mitchell way back in WIP 36. See that issue for more details.

**Sherilyn Fenn** appeared in three episodes of *Dawson's Creek* as Alex Pearl: "Separate Ways (Worlds Apart)" (April 24), "After Hours (Life Without Jen)" (May 1), and "The Abby" (May 8).

**Miguel Ferrer** appeared on *Late Night With Conan O'Brien* on May 3. He discussed working on *Crossing Jordan*. Working on a morgue set disturbed him at first, but no longer (which gave him cause for another kind of concern). He talked about a vacation, and playing practical jokes on (and with) his cousin George Clooney. Miguel's mother was Rosemary Clooney and dad was Jose Ferrer, so he got to meet quite a few famous people growing up, including Marilyn Monroe (though he was just a baby at the time). The appearance lasted eight minutes.

**Kiefer Sutherland** appeared on *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* on May 9. He talked about the trouble he got into after his November 12, 2001 appearance on *Leno* when he accidentally revealed a plot point from an unaired 24 episode. Sutherland talked about "an incredibly scary moment" when he was on the rodeo circuit. He talked about his fourteen-year-old daughter, then about musical guest Neil Young, of whom he's a big fan. The interview lasted eight minutes.

On May 20, the night before the first season finale of 24, **Sutherland** was a guest on *Late Late Show With Craig Kilborn*. After a show clip, Sutherland talked about the one time he visited the Playboy mansion, then talked about the three different endings shot (to keep the real ending from leaking out). "All of the questions get answered; there is an ending." Nevertheless, the show did get picked up for a second season. He talked about his surprise at winning a Golden Globe Award. After a commercial break, Sutherland denied a report that *Bambi* is his favorite film, though he does enjoy it. He then participated in "Five Questions" and got three correct. (Ironically, one of the questions he missed was when Kilborn asked, "I'm thinking of a number between one and one billion. What is it?" Sutherland picked sixty-three. Obviously, the correct answer was twenty-four.) The segments totaled almost thirteen minutes.

The same night, **Sutherland** was on *Last Call With Carson Daly*. Sutherland explained his long name (five middle names), then praised his supportive parents (his father, of course, is actor Donald Sutherland). He talked



Lynch at the Academy Awards



Lynch on Independent Focus



Fenn on Dawson's Creek



Ferrer on Conan



Sutherland on Leno



Sutherland on Kilborn



Sutherland on Daly



Boyle on Leno—plus a scene from *Twin Peaks*



MacLachlan on Kilborn



Isaak on Kilborn

about the period of time when he was a teenager just beginning to act when the film industry was allowing young actors (such as Timothy Hutton and Sean Penn) to play characters about their ages instead of hiring older actors to play teenagers. After some general talk about Sutherland's career, Daly returned from a commercial break noting that because of the structure of 24, he was originally worried that, "if you missed it—like *Twin Peaks*, if you caught the middle of it (without seeing the beginning), you were screwed, and you couldn't get back into it." (Daly didn't provide any hint that he was aware of Sutherland's *Twin Peaks* connection by co-starring in *Fire Walk With Me*.) Daly admitted, however, that even though he began watching in the middle, he was "completely hooked" on 24. Sutherland and Daly discussed the "real-time" concept of the series. The segments lasted about seventeen minutes.

**Kyle MacLachlan** appeared on *Late Late Show* on June 20. He showed off his wedding ring and talked about his wedding from two months ago. He talked about his work on *Sex and the City* for two-and-a-half years. He was heading to London to do a two-man play with Woody Harrelson. After a commercial break, MacLachlan mentioned that he did one of the voices in the *Grand Theft Auto* video game. He also will be starring in *Me Without You*. For "Five Questions," he got two out of five correct (missing the fill-in-the-blank "Sand \_\_\_\_\_" question—he guessed "sandwich," though of course the correct answer is "sand dune," a reference to his *Dune* role). The segments totaled twelve minutes.

**Chris Isaak** performed "One Day" (from his new album *Always Got Tonight*) on *The Tonight Show* on June 14.

**Lara Flynn Boyle** appeared on *The Tonight Show* on June 28. She talked about breaking her foot. It turns out she lives near Jay Leno, though he said he never sees her out (yet he does see Bruce Springsteen all the time). Leno showed a fake "Celebrity Bio" film he put together (*Twin Peaks* got a mention and picture). She talked about the *Men in Black II* premiere, then Leno showed a clip from the film. The interview lasted eight minutes. (She remained while "crocodile hunter" Steve Irwin brought out a huge crocodile; Boyle

refused to get close to the animal.)

On June 11, Leno spoke on the phone with a doctor, Dr. John Rizza, who runs a sperm donor clinic in New England. He had been quoted in a newspaper article:

It's not that they're snobs, but would you want your kid having Ross Perot's ears or Jay Leno's chin or Jimmy Durante's nose? "If Jay Leno walked in here, he wouldn't get approved," says Rizza. "I wouldn't do that to a woman, or a baby. The facial features have to complement each other."

With mock anger, Leno called the doctor and asked who are the most-requested men women ask to have their babies look like. Rizza said, "The top choices are Brad Pitt, **Chris Isaak**, Matt Damon, George Clooney."

**Isaak** was a guest on the *Late Late Show* on July 22. After a clip from *The Chris Isaak Show* that included Isaak's real-life mother, he talked about how she gets recognized by the public after each appearance. In a conversation that quickly jumped from topic to topic, Isaak and Kilborn discussed plastic surgery (Isaak won't have anything done to "fix" his nose), the perfect height for a man, marriage (Isaak isn't married), Isaak as a "stalker," and increased recognition since the start of his TV show. After a commercial break, Isaak said he'll never leave his music career: "The acting is just a sham to try to get people to buy the music," he joked. Kilborn points out that Isaak wrote the *Late Late Show* theme song. Isaak still enjoys surfing, but he's never been to



Isaak performing "One Day" on Leno



Amick on *The Rats*



Zabriskie on *John Doe*



Kelly on *Hack*



Fenn on *Law & Order: SVU*



Wise on *She-Spies*



Watts on *Conan*

a strip club in his life: "I have nothing against it, but it would be like going to McDonald's and just standing and looking in the window. I don't get the concept. It's like, beautiful girls will come until I get real excited, and then I will go home alone. I just turn to the Mexican weather channel.... They dress crazy on those shows." For "Five Questions," Isaak got all five correctly. (Most amusing: when asked to name one musician he can't stand, Isaak said, "Beethoven. Lousy lyrics.") Later in the program, Isaak performed "Life Will Go On." The interview segments lasted almost fourteen minutes; the song lasted about three.

*The Rats*, a film starring Madchen Amick, finally aired on Fox on September 19.

Grace Zabriskie had a recurring role as "Yellow Teeth" in *John Doe*, one of the more interesting new network offerings of the season. She appeared in episodes "Blood Lines" (September 27), "Doe Re: Me" (October 4), "Mind Games" (November 11), and "Idaho" (November 15).

Speaking of October 4 (well, we were, sorta), that turned out to be a virtual *Twin Peaks* reunion night on television, featuring three different former TP actors! David Patrick Kelly (looking very little like his Jerry Horne character) guest starred in that night's episode of *Hack* on CBS ("Favors"), while Sherilyn Fenn was featured on NBC in *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* ("Deception").

And speaking of Fenn, she played Harley Quinn in the original unaired pilot of the WB's *Birds of Prey*, but when the show was picked up for the season, she opted out, and the character was recast. Her choice seemed odd at the time—why pass on a potentially fascinating and popular character in a highly-promoted new series that had the potential of being the next *Scrubs*-like breakout hit. Here's one possibility: she'd seen some of the upcoming scripts. While *BOP* looked snazzy and could have been a really cool series, it contained some of the worst writing we'd ever seen on a dramatic network series (or syndicated series, for that matter). Simple, basic dialogue was so ineptly written that we were disappointed almost immediately. Lots of other people must have been, too; the show has already been canceled. In retrospect, Fenn's decision was quite wise.

Ray Wise made a guest appearance on the stupefyingly silly syndicated show *She-Spies* in October in the "Daddy's Girl" episode.

Naomi Watts was a guest on *Late Show With David Letterman* on October 16. She admitted to being nervous and talked about being a presenter with L.L. Cool J last night on the VH1 Vogue Fashion Awards and going to P. Diddy's party afterward. She's friends with Nicole Kidman. She



Three scenes of Sherilyn Fenn in the original *Birds of Prey* pilot.

talked about *The Ring*. The segment lasted almost eight minutes.

**David Bowie** performed on *Late Night* on October 18 and talked briefly afterward with Conan about his current tour. After a commercial break, Bowie performed again to close out the show. His segments lasted about nine minutes.

**Chris Mulkey** and **Tracey Walter** guest starred in the October 20 episode of *Boontown* ("Reelin' in the Years").

**Sutherland** returned to the *Tonight Show* on October 28. He talked about attending the World Series, and about the 24 cast Halloween party. After relating some childhood Halloween memories, Sutherland talked about working on his show. Leno got him to admit that the second season involves a terrorist bomb threat. His segment lasted over eight minutes, though he remained for the rest of the show.

On November 11, **Sutherland** appeared on the *Late Late Show*. After a clip from 24, Sutherland and Kilborn talked about the show's increasingly stronger ratings. Kilborn showed Sutherland's *GQ* photo as one of the magazine's Men of the Year. Sutherland's gift basket went to his assistant (as all his gift baskets do). He talked about his early career and driving out to Los Angeles from New York with his girlfriend (who lost a \$4000 cashier's check he'd made from doing a Levi's commercial). After a commercial break, Sutherland admitted that he only recently obtained an answering machine (his agent insisted because the actor was losing work from missed messages). He then played "Five Questions" and got four correct. Sutherland's segments lasted about twelve minutes.

**Bowie** made a cameo appearance on the November 6 episode of *Conan*.

**Watts** appeared on *The Tonight Show* on November 25. Leno complimented her work on *Mulholland Drive*, especially the scene with Chad Everett. Watts talked about doing promotion for *The Ring* around the world. She knew from an early age that she wanted to act. After a commercial break, Leno asked her about her friendship with Kidman. Watts said that, even after *Mulholland Drive* and *The Ring*, she



Watts on Letterman

doesn't get recognized very often, she talks about *The Ring*, and Leno showed a clip. She's currently working on a movie called *Twenty-One Grams*. Watts's segments lasted over twelve minutes, though she stayed for the remainder of the show.

**Isaak** performed "American Boy" at the 2002 *GQ* Men of the Year Awards, televised on December 14. **Sutherland** was named *GQ* Dramatic Television Actor of the Year and accepted his award from director Joel Schumacher (who directed the actor in the 1987 movie *The Lost Boys*).

#### Et Cetera

Laura Elena Harring was scheduled to be one of the presenters at the American Latino Media Arts Awards on May 18 (televised June 1).

In the July 2002 issue of *Pulse*, David Bowie picked Julie Cruise's *The Voice of Love* as one of his "desert island" choices (music he would want with him if he were stranded on a desert island). (Thanks Eric Levy.)



Walter on Boomtown



Mulkey on Boomtown



Sutherland on Leno



Sutherland on Kilborn



Bowie on Conan



Watts on Leno

In the July 2002 issue of *Maxim* (U.S.), Lynch's *Dune* makes #20 on the "worst movies of all time." Okay, it's Lynch's worst film, but the (twentieth) worst movie of all time? Not hardly. The same list puts Terrence Malick's stunning *The Thin Red Line* at #16, so *Dune* is in great company. (Number one on the list is *Batman & Robin*, which could certainly make a case.)

Though she wasn't in *Twin Peaks*, we'll still note that Russ Tamblyn's daughter Amber appeared in the September 18 episode of *The Twilight Zone* ("Evergreen").

Finally, the University of Texas press has just published *Screen Couple Chemistry: The Power of 2* by Martha Nochimson (*The Passion of David Lynch*). One chapter covers Mulder and Scully of *The X-Files*. We'll try to have more on this in the future—we're out of room for this this issue!



Isaac and Sutherland at the 2002 GQ Men of the Year Awards



Kimmy Robertson in a Lean Cuisine commercial



(Von Dohlen continued from page 7) story, I'm very proud of that work. I did another movie called *Tollbooth* that actually has a Lynch influence. The director was named Salome Brezner. We shot that in the Keys, where there's a lot of madness. That's cool. You'll like that. If you like *Twin Peaks*, you will like *Tollbooth*. There's another movie I did called *Under the Billboard Clock*, with Sean Young. I played an "F. Scott Fitzgerald" kind of character. He's rather elegant—certainly not like Billy Galvin.

*Tender Mercies* was my very first movie. It was a small part. My first scene in a motion picture was with Robert Duvall. I was spoiled. I mean, that experience—and *Twin Peaks*—were right up there in terms of the creative process being perfected. Bruce Beresford directed that. *Leaving Normal* was another good one. It came out during the riots. I've never been in a film that people were forbidden to see. There was a curfew when it opened!

There is another Web site you might want to check out. It was started by a woman some years ago in Japan, of all places. I've never met her, but it's pretty good. She's got sound bytes on there and everything. If you enter my name on the search engine, [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), it should come up. [Ed. note: The address for the site is: <http://www5.big.or.jp/~syntax/kenny-en.html>]

**CM:** Do you have projects coming up we can look for?

**LVD:** I just did a play at the Pasadena Playhouse called *The Blue Room*. A producer from New York saw that. He is working on a play by Tennessee Williams that would just be my dream come true. It looks like that may happen after the first of the year with Amanda Plummer. It's called *The Two Character Play* and it is a two character play. It is one of Tennessee's later, and more frenzied, works. It is rarely done. It is almost, to some people, incomprehensible, because he was in such a way when he wrote it. But I think—and Amanda agrees with me—that it is one of the great plays that people just haven't seen. It was so ahead of its time. Talk about entering a world! It's a bit different than what you and I are used to.

**CM:** Do you do a lot of theater work?

**LVD:** That's what brought me to the table to begin with. I had never thought about movies or TV. It just happened by accident. I was in New York doing my plays, and I got *Tender Mercies*. *Electric Dreams* was really quick after that: I was starring in a movie for MGM when it was still American-owned! [Laughter]

**CM:** Do you prefer stage work to film?

**LVD:** I do, I have to say. Because of the process. I love everything about it. I love the journey that the character takes from beginning to end. If you took out everything in between and just watched Harold Smith from beginning to end, you might approximate what it could

have been if it had been on stage. But I doubt it. It's watching a life before you that, hopefully, will affect you.

I am one of the individuals whose idea of heaven is eight [shows] a week. A lot of people don't go for that anymore. They think that's too much. Actors are so lazy now. But that's my idea of pure bliss—eight-a-week. That's what I was doing. I thought I was going to do that the rest of my life, and then other things happened. I enjoy making movies. I especially enjoy working with great directors.

I wanted to be a jockey when I was growing up. But I grew too tall. I grew to be six-one. It was devastating. Somehow acting came up, and that became my obsession. When that devastation happened with the jockey business I thought, "Okay, I don't want to be the kind of actor who does just one thing. I want to play many things." So I thought, "I've got to get rid of my Texas accent." I saw an ad in the back of *Life* magazine for John Gielgud doing Shakespeare—*The Ages of Man*. It came on a record, so I sent away for that. I listened to it until I completely exorcised my Texas accent. I did that pretty effectively. I have to say. I moved to New York, and I got *Tender Mercies* and I had to get a Texas accent! [Laughter] I had to play a good ole' boy! So I called my brother. I would just talk to him!

**CM:** Well, that's all the questions we have for now. Thanks for taking the time to talk with us.

COULD THIS POSSIBLY BE  
THE FINAL

# X-Files Extra?

Way back when, *Wrapped in Plastic* was the first magazine to give *The X-Files* regular coverage. We began, of course, because of David Duchovny's appearance in Tim Peck's as DEA Agent Dennis Bryson. Following the success of our XP-dominated issue 12, we began a regular feature, "X-Files Extra," in order to keep the huge amount of XP-related news separate from the more general "World Spins" David Lynch-related material.

WIP's readers were split on whether "X-Files Extra" should be dropped from the magazine entirely or kept (or even expanded). We enjoyed doing it and so just kept rolling along with the coverage. And now, over nine years later, we may be just about the last magazine still giving XP regular coverage! (Of course, we're the only magazine still giving Tim Peck's regular coverage, too, so it all seems to make sense in some strange way.)

In WIP 61, we finally got around to reviewing the series finale of *The X-Files*. This issue, we have some remaining odds and ends to wrap up.

Is this the final installment of "X-Files Extra"? Probably not. There's been vague talk about the possibilities of a movie (or movies) sometime down the road. And we still haven't gotten around to reviewing the most recent DVD set (or is it the last two?) Those things come out faster than we can keep up. We probably also have some XP-related covers lying around here that we've never gotten around to reproducing.

It's more likely that this is the final regularly-scheduled installment of "X-Files Extra." We might be back next issue, but it might be the issue after that. Or the issue after. We might even fold the Duchovny-related news back into "World Spins," which is where the XP news started out. We haven't really decided. (Where does that leave coverage of Gillian Anderson? She's never worked with Lynch, so the coverage doesn't really belong in "World Spins." Yet she seems like one of the family, especially because we interviewed her in issue 12. We haven't made up our minds about this, either.)

One way or another, XP will continue to pop up in some manner in these pages in the future—no doubt to the consternation of some readers and the delight of others.

## Duchovny on Life With Bonnie

David Duchovny has appeared in a couple episodes of the Bonnie Hunt sitcom *Life With Bonnie* as Johnny Volcano, a television weatherman from Chicago. On October 1 he appeared in the episode "Weather or Not" and returned on November 19 for "Partly Sunny."

We missed the first appearance but caught the November 19 episode that was co-written (with Don Lake) and directed by Hunt. She plays the host of a talk show, *Morning Chicago*. She and Johnny Volcano won a charity auction to make a one-day guest appearance on a soap opera, *Moments of the Day*, playing doctors. Johnny is Bonnie's guest that morning to talk about the broadcast and present a rough cut of the soap opera footage.

While *Life With Bonnie* struck us as a competent if pedestrian show, Duchovny himself was hilarious. For the *Moments* clip, Johnny had some weird accent (he claimed it was a British accent, but it didn't sound at all British) and a limp—quirks he had picked up based on his hours of study to prepare for the role. It turned out, however, that his preparation did not include visiting

hospitals (he reasoned that because doctors are not actors, and he is, what kind of help could they provide?). Instead, he simply taped all of the soap operas and watched how the doctors acted in those!

Johnny also made it a point to tell Bonnie about the script he was going to be pitching in Hollywood—a combination comedy and drama that he calls a "dramedy" (she points out the correct term is "dramedy"). He plans to head out to Los Angeles and so has pre-taped a month of weather reports. How can someone pre-tape weather reports, Bonnie asks. "It's Chicago. It's winter. Cold and windy's a good bet," he explains, acting as if it were a dumb question.

If you missed it the first time around, this is worth checking out during reruns.

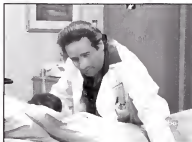
Duchovny had previously worked with Hunt in the feature film *Return to Me* (2000), which she co-wrote (with Lake) and directed.

## Miscellaneous News

David Milner sends this information: William B. Davis is in a new series, *Body and Soul*, where he plays the recurring role of pathologist Dr. Edward A. Esnell. Davis's character is a quirky one, as he apparently kisses corpses and sings opera. The show has been shooting since July in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and wraps in November. The series premiered September 16 on PAX and also stars Peter Strauss and Larissa Laskin.

Megan Leitch is starring in an independent Canadian feature, *See Grace Fly*, with Ben Ratner. It is written and directed by Pete McCormack. The premise is a missionary who returns from Africa to find his sister suffering from paranoid schizophrenia.

Robert Patrick is shooting the NBC mini series *1st to Die* in Vancouver. The miniseries also features Angie Everhart, Gil Bellows, Sean Young, Carly Pope, and Tracy Pollan.



Top far left: Duchovny in *Life With Bonnie* as Johnny Volcano, the Chicago weatherman, making an appearance on *Morning Chicago*. (Bonnie Hunt is in the background.) Bottom far left: Johnny in a pre-taped weather report. Left: Johnny playing a doctor in *Moments of the Day*.





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